

THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

PHILOSOPHY—THEOLOGY—MYSTICISM

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[A proposed 2nd and revised edition of Samuel Zinner,
Christianity and Islam: Essays on Ontology and Archetype (London 2010)]

~ For Zachary Markwith

In appreciation . . .

INTRODUCTORY EXPLANATORY NOTE
TO THE PROPOSED CORRECTED 2ND EDITION

This pdf file contains a proposed 2nd revised and corrected edition of my book *Christianity and Islam: Essays on Ontology and Archetype*, published in London by The Matheson Trust in 2010. (The Matheson Trust retains the copyright to the original 2010 edition). For this proposed revised edition I have chosen the new title *The Abrahamic Religions: Philosophy—Theology—Mysticism*.

Samuel Zinner
March 2021
Aulla, Tuscany, Italy

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PREFACE (2021)

My 2010 monograph *Christianity and Islam: Essays on Ontology and Archetype* was published over a decade ago in London by The Matheson Trust. I have long felt the need to update the book. Although my earlier study referred regularly to the Jewish parallels and roots of many of the Christian and Islamic philosophical, theological and mystical ideas I surveyed, with few exceptions I did not elaborate to any significant degree on those Jewish sources. That is to say, the Jewish current remained mostly implicit or *en passant*. In this proposed 2nd revised and corrected edition I endeavor to make more explicit the Jewish sources for the Christian and Islamic themes I discuss, traditions which of course innovatively transformed in various ways the earlier Jewish sources. The way I accomplish this is by means of this new Preface, a new chapter 1, revisions, additions and corrections made throughout the various individual chapters, and a new concluding chapter.

Ashkenazi and Indigenous American cultures have been the predominant influences on my character and thought since childhood. My other ancestral lines interest me less as the decades roll by. It is perhaps natural that as the years accumulate and the end starts to come into somewhat clearer relief, the beginning increasingly imposes itself ever more forcefully: “We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time” (T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*).

Physicists are currently trying to discover what gravity might actually be. I already know what it is—time is gravity, the weight of years. The following scattered lines from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “Ulysses” poem give expression to this weight, yet also to the impulse of the spirit that seeks to endure and thrive despite the gravity of time:

- 51 Death closes all: but something ere the end,
- 52 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
- 57 ‘T is not too late to seek a newer world.
- 65 Tho’ much is taken, much abides; and tho’
- 66 We are not now that strength which in old days
- 67 Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
- 70 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

In my youth I wandered through the Mojave Desert pondering the nature of Lady Wisdom, that enigmatic celestial figure of Jewish scripture who in Proverbs 8 declared herself present with God before creation—a theme developed later in the post-Tanakh Jewish writings Sirach 24, Wisdom 7 and Baruch 3-4. Everything else through the years flowed from those youthful desert meditations on Lady Wisdom. As the decades passed, I could not help but seek out the various developments this feminine celestial figure underwent in later Jewish sources, and then in Christian and Islamic traditions. The present monograph relays many of my discoveries and musings made while on this odyssey.

I have tried to present the relevant Christian and Islamic traditions in not only a respectful tone, but often also with a genuine sense of admiration, especially when these notions most clearly retain an integral continuity with their Jewish matrix. I do not necessarily agree, however, with all the non-Jewish developments Lady Wisdom underwent in Christianity and Islam—Christians and

Muslims themselves frequently disagree with each other on these issues. My discussion of various non-Jewish traditions in the present monograph consequently should not be interpreted as necessarily always reflecting my own personal views.

The great Jewish theological authority Maimonides concluded that Christianity and Islam were religions that spread monotheism and eschatological messianic expectations to the nations in a way that providentially prepared the nations for the eventual arrival of the true messianic era. Although Judaism cannot accept some of the doctrines that make Christianity and Islam distinct from the Jewish faith, nevertheless, from a Jewish perspective the light that shines in Judaism must perforce shine in various degrees through the two younger Abrahamic faiths. As Leo Baeck explains in his essay “Mystery and Commandment”:

The distinctive feature of Judaism—and its history also lives on in those religions which issued from it either immediately or meditately—is the power to liberate and renew, this messianic energy. Wherever Jewish piety is found, we encounter this strong drive to create, to fashion for the sake of God, to build the kingdom of God.¹

This citation illustrates how the most important comparative aspects between Judaism on the one hand and Christianity and Islam on the other pertain not so much to the doctrinal or dogmatic domains as to the field of ethics of the everyday world, a topic I elaborate in this monograph’s Chapter 1.

Another point to address here is that of my 2010 monograph’s survey of Christian mystical and Islamic Sufi traditions that deploy the exegetical dyad of the exoteric versus the esoteric, which tends to privilege the inward over the outward. Again, my presentation of such beliefs should not be construed as necessarily always reflecting my own personal views. My position on the exoteric-esoteric exegetical paradigm is that it may be a useful pedagogical tool to a limited extent, but it should not be accepted literally nor permanently. In more profound Abrahamic texts the dyad of the inner-outer is transcended, as in Abraham Abulafia’s *Sitrei Torah* 150b, which insists the outward (revealed) and inward (concealed) aspects of the Torah are both equally absolute.² This is also the case, necessarily in a different mode, in Asian and Far Eastern sources. As the Zen Master Huang Po taught, the common people look outward, at their surroundings, whereas those who follow the Path look inward, into their minds; yet the true *dharma* is to forget both the outward and the inward.³

Finally, one result of forgetting both the outward and the inward in an Abrahamic context is the emergence of apophysis, something much more radical than the Christian *via negativa*, according to which we can say only what God is not, not what God is. On the contrary, apophysis reaches its culmination in what might be called a supra-divine a-theism. Working our way backwards chronologically, a Christian example would be Meister Eckhart’s statement, “If I did not

¹ Leo Baeck, *Judaism and Christianity*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1960), p. 185.

²² See Elliot R. Wolfson, “The Bible in the Jewish Mystical Tradition,” in Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 1976-1990.

³ See John Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Huang-Po: On the Transmission of Mind* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), p. 41.

exist, God would not exist either.”⁴ The context in which this statement occurs will be helpful for grasping its profundity:

According to my unborn mode I have eternally been, am now, and shall eternally remain. That which I am by virtue of birth must die and perish, for it is mortal, and so must perish with time. In my birth all things were born, and I was the cause of myself and all things: and if I had so willed it, I would not have been, and all things would not have been. If I were not, God would not be either. I am the cause of God's being God: if I were not, then God would not be God.⁵

Next, some Islamic Sufis erase from end to beginning the profession of faith, “There is no God but God (Allah),” leaving only the final *lam-ha*, understood as the negation *la*, implying that in the end “God is not.” After all, doesn’t the Qur’an say repeatedly that God is beyond any human thought about the Divine? Lastly, and most profoundly of all, according to Jewish kabbalah, ultimately God is Infinite Nothingness, the *Eyn Sof*.

Thus, not only Abrahamic theologies, but also their mysticisms imply and even require their own self-transcendence, which is to say, self-erasure or self-negation. It is when God is absent that God is most present: “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? . . . Thou answerest not.” (Psalm 22:2a, 3a) The silence of the divine absence is the most eloquent answer. As Franz Kafka’s parable “Before the Law” hints, even if one is not let through the gate of Torah, one’s mission is to linger there and engage with the gatekeeper until the very end.

Long before Kafka, Yeshua ben Sirach wrote of celestial Lady Wisdom who descends to earth in the form of a personified scroll of Moses’ Torah: “Search out and seek, and she will become known to you; and when you get hold of her, do not let her go. / For at last you will find the rest she gives.” (Sirach 6:27-28a) Yet the last will be neither last nor first, and the outside will be neither outside nor inside. Only the gate, timeless and spaceless, will remain. There may I seek refuge in God, the Merciful and the Gracious (Exodus 34:6, ‘El rahum we-hannun). And God knows best. . . .

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March 2021
Aulla, Tuscany, Italy

⁴ My translation from the German.

⁵ Maurice O'C. Walshe, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*. Revised with a Foreword by Bernard McGinn (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2009), p. 424.

Part I

COMPARATIVE ESSAYS
ON PLATONIC INTELLECTION

Overview of Part I

Part I traces the various transformations the figure of the celestial Lady Wisdom of the Jewish scriptures underwent in Christianity (Logos doctrine) and Islam (“Mother of the Book”). The threads are traced in a series of comparative essays on Platonic and Neoplatonic understandings of epistemology and intellection. Chapter 1 explores Judaic ontology, which is based on the doctrines of theological monotheism and mystical monism. The essay, “The Semiotics of Inliteration of the *Umm al-Kitab* and Sacred Time Dialation,” explores the dynamics of the descent of suprasensible revelation onto the plane of human prophetic intellection from the framework of semiotics theory, assessing to what degree semiotics might be helpful, or present an impediment to understanding sacred texts as sacred “signs.” The eternal word pierces the veils of temporality through the mediation of a mode of the neoscholastic concept of *aevum*, a “sacred” time participating in both the timeless and the temporal.

My essays identify parallels to Platonic philosophical concepts in Abrahamic scriptures, demonstrating a compatibility and “divine sanction” of the perennial aspects of Hellenistic philosophy, including the sometimes problematic concepts of the soul’s pre-existence as well as resurrection and transmigration, with special reference to the appearance of these doctrines in various schools of thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. My exploration of the Platonic doctrine of image and likeness, or suprasensible archetype and sensible forms, incorporates *logia* from the *Gospel of Thomas* to explicate and illustrate the commonalities of traditional philosophy in Platonism and Jewish theological thought.

Part I also explores the theme of the celestial nature of Jesus (in Christian thought) in connection with the interpenetration of the divine *intellectus* and the created *ratio* as a way of understanding certain aspects of the doctrine of “the two natures of Christ,” a theme amplified in the chapter entitled, “Immanent *Intellectus* and the Divine Self-Contemplativity,” which is in essence an exploration of the modes of knowing God according to Sufi, Christian neo-scholastic (Aquinas) and mystical authors (such as St. John of the Cross). I am further concerned with the explication of the Neoplatonic and Thomistic synthesis of *esse* and *ens*, a synthesis which can be fruitfully compared to the Hindu doctrine of the mutual relationship between Brahman and Maya as well as the theoretical distinction between Beyond-Being and Being. The predominant Neoplatonic inspirations behind Aquinas’ thought are sometimes overlooked in standard scholarship.

Part I concludes by returning to the theme of the descent of supra-sensible revelation onto the plane of temporality and contingency. The concluding essay bears the title “Some Notes on the Spirit and Word in Abrahamic Texts” and maintains an overlapping conceptual equivalence between the Qur’anic Mother of the Book and the figure of the celestial Lady Wisdom of the Jewish scriptures, and additionally presents the case for a grammatical as well as conceptual correspondence between the Arabic word *amr* and its Aramaic cognate, *memra*, which in turn is roughly equivalent with the Greek term *logos*.

1. Judaic Ontology

All ontology in Judaism is anchored in Deuteronomy 6:4, the *Shema Israel*'s opening line, "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one": *Shema Yisrael YHWH 'Eloheinu YHWH 'echad*. In Hebrew the numerical value (gematria) of 'echad, "one," is 13, which is half of 26, the numerical value of the sacred Tetragrammaton, God's proper name, YHWH (Y=10, H=5, W=6, H=5). Deuteronomy 6:5 continues the *Shema Israel*, now beginning with a form of the verb for "love," *we-ahabte*: "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." If we take the substantive form of love, *ahabah* (אהבה), we will again have the numerical value of 13, which if added to the numerical value of 'echad will produce the sum 26. When Israel loves YHWH, Israel becomes one with YHWH; the two become one, in accord with a mystico-erotic application of Genesis 2:24's unity trope, "and they (the man and woman) shall be one flesh." This in turn harks back to Genesis 1:27: "And God created humanity in His own image, in the image of God created He humanity; male and female created He them." The same point is repeated in slightly different wording in Genesis 5:1b-2: "In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him / male and female created He them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created."

Kabbalah reasons on the basis of Genesis 1:27 that (1) if humanity is both male and female, and (2) if humanity is created in God's image, then (3) therefore God must be both male and female. In accord with Plato's *Timaeus*, the Midrash *Genesis Rabbah* 8:1 teaches that the first human, Adam, was created simultaneously male and female, that is, as an androgyne, in the form of a circle. This wheel-like human was subsequently divided into separate male and female halves. In the Genesis version of this mytheme, Adam's female component is removed from within him while in deep "surgical" sleep in the form of a rib that then becomes Eve.

Of course, Kabbalah does not take the trope of God's androgyny literally, given that God as such is beyond any categories. Nevertheless, the terminology of the dyad male-female plays richly variegated theological roles in Judaism, the apex of which is the model of the Holy One of Israel, blessed be He, as husband, and of Israel as God's wife, a model read into the Song of Songs, a text Rabbi Akiba called the Holy of Holies. R. Akiba's Holy of Holies label for the Song of Songs seems conceptually cognate with the Talmudic tradition which explains that in the Holy of Holies the two cherubim (one male, one female) in intimate embrace atop the ark of the covenant symbolized God and Israel as husband and wife in passionate union.

On a solely divine level the two cherubim in the Holy of Holies can also represent the male-female dimensions of God's own symbolically androgynous nature. Later Kabbalah would phrase this as the union between the Holy One of Israel, blessed be He, and the feminine divine presence called Shekhinah.

Already in the Second Temple period, the Jewish philosopher-theologian Philo of Alexandria taught on the basis of a celestial inspiration that the two cherubim represented the Greek divine names Theos (God) and Kyrios (Lord), corresponding to the Hebrew 'Elohim and 'Adonai (the traditional reverential substitute for YHWH), which for Philo respectively symbolized the divine mercy (beneficence/goodness) and judgement (sovereignty/authority). Beyond these two

powers is God or Being (or Beyond-Being) as such, represented by the name YHWH.⁶ That in this context Philo uses Kyrios to stand for 'Adonai rather than for YHWH is explained by Hillel Ben-Sasson:

Furthermore, it is important to note that as Philo is following the Septuagint, which regularly substitutes YHWH with *Adonai* (κύριος), he does not identify the power of judgment with YHWH but rather with *Adonai*. Identifying this name with the judicial leading force fits the meaning of *Adonai* (derived from “master” in Hebrew), but also adds to our understanding that this is not a mirror image of the rabbinical view but rather a fundamentally different religious approach.

It is important to note that Philo’s religious view does acknowledge the name YHWH, despite its almost complete absence from the Septuagint. This key fact reveals how his understanding of religious language reflects his conception of divinity. Philo attributes the name YHWH to the higher level of divinity in his triad. This is evidenced in the instances in which he discusses the great priest’s golden headplate, which according to Masoretic tradition read “Holy to YHWH”. We find then that both in Philo’s works and in rabbinic literature, the Tetragrammaton is the Unique Name identified with God’s most unique essence. Yet Philo holds that this essence is the absolute, impersonal being.⁷

The Rabbis were to later modify Philo’s symbolism, making YHWH stand for Mercy, and 'Elohim for Judgment. The main difference between the Philonic and Rabbinic teachings in this regard is that in Philo’s dyad Theos and Kyrios, Kyrios stands for 'Adonai, not for YHWH. The Rabbis have collapsed Philo’s triadic model into a dyad of the two divine attributes of Mercy (YHWH) and Judgment ('Elohim). In so doing they first consolidated into one Philo’s Being and Kyrios (representing YHWH and 'Adonai respectively). Second, they reversed Philo’s symbolism by associating 'Elohim with Judgment instead of with Mercy.

The Rabbinic consolidation was the result of their different philosophical approach. As Ben-Sasson points out, the Rabbis had no interest in the Platonic or Neoplatonic trope of Being as such that is “uninvolved” with creation. However, the Rabbis were not unsophisticated philosophically; they accordingly imbued the coordinate YHWH-Mercy with the notion of what the Holy One *is*, whereas 'Elohim-Judgment represents what the Holy One *does*. Although the Rabbis do not use this exact terminology, it is presupposed in their teaching that Mercy predominates over Judgment. The later kabbalah’s concept of the *Ein Sof* does, however, approximate Philo’s Platonic Being as such.⁸

In the Philonic model, the divine Logos mediates between the two divine powers or names represented by Theos/ 'Elohim and Kyrios/ 'Adonai, as we read in Philo, *On the Cherubim*:

⁶ Hillel Ben-Sasson, *Understanding YHWH: The Name of God in Biblical, Rabbinic, and Medieval Jewish Thought*. Translated by Michelle Bubis (Jewish Thought and Philosophy; Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 85-88.

⁷ Hillel Ben-Sasson, *Understanding YHWH*, p. 87.

⁸ Hasidic theosophy, inspired by Isaac Luria was to develop the doctrine of *Atsmut* ('smwt), which posits *eyn sof* as intermediary link between and *Atsmut* and the highest *sefira*, Keter, Crown.

27 I have also, on one occasion, heard a more ingenious train of reasoning from my own soul, which was accustomed frequently to be seized with a certain divine inspiration, even concerning matters which it could not explain even to itself; which now, if I am able to remember it accurately, I will relate. It told me that in the one living and true God there were two supreme and primary powers—goodness and authority; and that by his goodness he had created every thing, and by his authority he governed all that he had created; 28 and that the third thing which was between the two, and had the effect of bringing them together was reason (*logos*), for that it was owing to reason that God was both a ruler and good. Now, of this ruling authority and of this goodness, being two distinct powers, the cherubim were the symbols, but of reason the flaming sword was the symbol.⁹

On the Cherubim's triad of God-Logos-Lord is comparable, in a differently configured way, to another divine triad in Philo's *On Abraham* 121, where he interprets the three angels who visited and dined with Abraham as narrated in Genesis 18 as an allegory for the divine beneficence (=God) and sovereignty (=Lord) who flank the central figure who is called both "the Father of the Universe" and LXX Exodus 3:14's "He that IS" (in Hebrew *'Ehyeh 'asher 'Ehyeh*, "I will be what/who I will be"):

Rather, as anyone who has approached nearest to the truth would say, the central place is held by the Father of the Universe, Who in the sacred scriptures is called He that IS as His proper name, while on either side of Him are the senior potencies, the nearest to Him, the creative and the kingly. The title of the former is God, since it made and ordered the All; the title of the latter is Lord, since it is the fundamental right of the maker to rule and control what he has brought into being.¹⁰

Philo's triadic expression of the divine unity has a number of Jewish precedents, above all in Deuteronomy 6:4's triad of divine names that are declared to be "one": "YHWH our God, YHWH is one." Moreover, although the Tetragrammaton consists of four letters, it has only three unique letters, *yod*, *heh*, *waw*, given that the letter *heh* is repeated. The numerical value of *yod-heh-waw* is 21, which matches the numerical value of the divine name *'Ehyeh*, "I will be," of Exodus 3:14: "And God said unto Moses: 'I WILL BE WHAT I AM' (*'Ehyeh 'asher 'Ehyeh*); and He said: 'Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: I WILL BE (*'Ehyeh*) hath sent me unto you.'" Similarly, in Exodus 34:6, when God appears to Moses, God announces a declaration that begins with a threefold formula: *YHWH YHWH 'El*, "LORD, LORD, God. . ." One could bring to bear other important triads in the Tanakh, above all the previously mentioned divine name *'Ehyeh 'asher 'Ehyeh* ("I will be who/what I will be"), the Qedushah (Isaiah 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy"), and the three verses of the Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26).

In *On Abraham* 122-123 and 131-132, Philo hastens to add in explanation that the trope of God's three-foldness is reserved for those at the initiatory level, serving merely as an aid for a later attainment of the knowledge of God's strict oneness:

⁹ Yonge translation.

¹⁰ Yonge translation.

Yonge Translation

Loeb Translation

<p>122 Therefore, the middle person of the three, being attended by each of his powers as by body-guards, presents to the mind, which is endowed with the faculty of sight, a vision at one time of one being, and at another time of three; of one when the soul being completely purified, and having surmounted not only the multitudes of numbers, but also the number two, which is the neighbour of the unit, hastens onward to that idea which is devoid of all mixture, free from all combination, and by itself in need of nothing else whatever; and of three, when, not being as yet made perfect as to the important virtues, it is still seeking for initiation in those of less consequence, and is not able to attain to a comprehension of the living God by its own unassisted faculties without the aid of something else, but can only do so by judging of his deeds, whether as creator or as governor.</p> <p>123 This then, as they say, is the second best thing; and it no less partakes in the opinion which is dear to and devoted to God. But the firstmentioned disposition has no such share, but is itself the very God-loving and God-beloved opinion itself, or rather it is truth which is older than opinion, and more valuable than any seeming. But we must now explain what is intimated by this statement in a more perspicuous</p>	<p>122 So the central Being with each of His potencies as His squire presents to the mind which has vision the appearance sometimes of one, sometimes of three: of one, when that mind is highly purified and, passing beyond not merely the multiplicity of other numbers, but even the dyad which is next to the unit, presses on to the ideal form which is free from mixture and complexity, and being self-contained needs nothing more; of three, when, as yet uninitiated into the highest mysteries, it is still a votary only of the minor rites and unable to apprehend the Existent alone by Itself and apart from all else, but only through Its actions, as either creative or ruling.</p> <p>123 This is, as they say, “second best voyage”; yet all the same there is in it an element of a way of thinking such as God approves. But the former state of mind has not merely an element. It is in itself the divinely-approved way, or rather it is the truth, higher than a way of thinking, more precious than anything which is merely thought.</p>
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<p>manner.</p> <p>131 But that which is seen is in reality a threefold appearance of one subject is plain, not only from the contemplation of the allegory, but also from that of the express words in which the allegory is couched.</p> <p>132 For when the wise man entreats those persons who are in the guise of three travellers to come and lodge in his house, he speaks to them not as three persons, but as one, and says, “My lord, if I have found favour with thee, do not thou pass by thy Servant.” (Gen 18:3.) For the expressions, “my lord,” and “with thee,” and “do not pass by,” and others of the same kind, are all such as are naturally addressed to a single individual, but not to many. And when those persons, having been entertained in his house, address their entertainer in an affectionate manner, it is again one of them who promises that he by himself will be present, and will bestow on him the seed of a child of his own, speaking in the following words: “I will return again and visit thee again, according to the time of life, and Sarah thy wife shall have a Son.” (Gen 18:10.)</p>	<p>131 That the triple vision is in reality a vision of a single object is clear not merely from the principles of allegory but from the literal text which contains the following account.</p> <p>132 When the Sage supplicates the three seeming travellers to accept his hospitality, he discourses with them as though they were one and not three. He says, “Sir, if indeed I have found favour with thee, do not thou pass thy servant by.” Here “Sir” and “with thee” and “do not thou pass” and the other like phrases must be addressed to one and not to more than one; and during their entertainment, when they show courtesy to their host, we find one only, as though no other was present, promising the birth of a son born in wedlock in the following words: “I will return and come to thee at this season next year, and Sarah, thy wife, shall have a son.”</p>
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Contextually considered, Exodus 3:14-16 links the Tetragrammaton to the Hebrew verb for *to be/exist, hayah* (הָיָה). This explains the traditional formula of *Targum Jonathan* Exodus 3:14, “I am Who I am and Who-Will-Be,” which *Targum Jonathan* Deuteronomy 32:39 expands triadically: “I am He Who is and Who was and I am He Who will be.” J. Massingberd Ford points out that the

similar formula in Revelation 1:4, 8 substitutes the verb “be” with “come,”¹¹ and she explains that this addition is shaped by Psalm 118:26, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.” The Jewish Morning Service liturgy shows a comparable triadic application of the theme of God’s rule: “The Lord reigneth; the Lord hath reigned; the Lord shall reign for ever and ever.”¹²

Elliot R. Wolfson summarizes Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s teaching on the Tetragrammaton with relation to time:

The name YHWH instructs that he is above time, for he was, is, and will be in one moment . . . and he is also above place for he brings about constantly the entire aspect of place from above to below and in the four sides. Even though he, blessed be he, is above place and time, he is nonetheless found below in place and time, that is, he is unified in the attribute of his kingship [*mityahed be-middat malkhuto*] whence place and time emanate and come to be. . . .¹³

Wolfson comments on Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn’s teaching on the Tetragrammaton, which is anchored in Deuteronomy 6:4:

In one of his better-known discourses from 5629 (1869), which deals with the fundamental obligation of the Jew to unify the divine, Shmuel Schneersohn expressed this metaphysical axiom in terms of the consonants of the word *ehad*, “one,” the last word in the proclamation of God’s unity (Deut 6:4): the *alef* is the Infinite, the *heit*, whose numerical value is eight, alludes to the seven heavens and the earth, and the *dalet*, whose numerical value is four, alludes to the four spirits of the world, that is, the four cardinal points, east, west, north, and south. In uttering the word *ehad*, therefore, one intends that “even though the seven heavens, the earth, and the four spirits were created, they are nonetheless absolutely nullified [*betelim be-takhlit*] vis-à-vis the aspect of the *alef*, which is the aspect of the Infinite [*ein sof*], the master of the world [*alufo shel olam14*

Lastly, Wolfson brings attention to Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson’s Deuteronomy 6:4-based teaching on the Tetragrammaton in *Iggerot Qodesh*, no. 220, 2:117:

In the context of contrasting the nullification of existence and the nullification of something, associated respectively with the supernal unity and the lower unity (see chapter 2, n. 58), he offers the following exegesis of the word *ehad* in Deut 6:4 . . . to elucidate the former type of unification: “All this is alluded in the letter *alef*—the master of the world [*alufo shel olam*], which proceeds by means of the *heit*, the supernal Wisdom [*hokmah illa’ah*], the beginning of the concatenation, until it emanates the world by means of the *dalet*—Speech

¹¹ J. Massingberd Ford, “‘He That Cometh’ and the Divine Name (Apocalypse 1, 4. 8; 4, 8),” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 1/2 (1970): pp. 144-147; here pp. 144-145.

¹² S. Singer, *The Standard Prayer Book: Authorized English Translation* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 5719/1958), p. 33.

¹³ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 89.

¹⁴ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 135-136.

[*dibbur*]. However, the Speech is bound to its source in Thought [*mahashavah*], and even higher: the Speech that is in its source, that is, the Speech that is in Thought, and therefore the *dalet* is enlarged.”¹⁵

Christian faith emphasizes the Trinitarian formula, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” which first appears towards the end of Matthew 28. The Sufis imagine that the “original” Gospel (purportedly written in “Syriac”) began with the formula, “In the name of the Father, and of the Mother, and of the Son.”¹⁶ Their point is that just as the Torah and Qur’an begin with the letter *b*, so did the original Gospel. The Qur’an begins with the triadic formula called the *basmalah*, “In the name of God (*bismillah*), the Merciful, the Compassionate,” which opens with the particle *bi-*.¹⁷ The Torah begins with the statement, “In the beginning (*bereshit*) God created the heavens and the earth,” which opens with the particle *be-*.

Philo consistently teaches that the three Patriarchs and Moses were living embodiments of the Law and Logos. However, in the end, it is Moses above all who embodies the Logos. This dyadic paradigm is congruent with Exodus 14:31: “and they believed in the LORD, and in His servant Moses.” The dual statement of faith in God and in Moses has later reverberations among the Samaritans and in the Ebionite (or at least Ebionite-like) Clementine literature, the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions*. In Islam the statement is modified by replacing the mention of Moses with that of the Prophet of Islam.

From a Jewish perspective, the uniqueness of Moses and his prophethood flows from God’s uniqueness, as we read in the Midrash *Deuteronomy Rabbah*:

R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Hosiah: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, I do not deprive any creature of due reward. By your life! You testified regarding Me and said: “Know therefore this day and lay it to your heart [that the Lord alone is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other]” (Deut. 4:39); so do I testify regarding you and say: “No prophet has since arisen in Israel like Moses” (Deut. 34:10). This shows that The Holy One, blessed be He, does not deprive any creature of due reward.¹⁸

Despite the differences between the two, John 1’s pre-existent Logos who becomes an embodied human being is essentially indebted to Philo’s teaching on Moses as living embodiment

¹⁵ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 376. The enlargement of the *dalet* has in mind that in traditional Torah scrolls, Deuteronomy 6:4’s final letter *dalet* is written larger than the surrounding text’s letters. Also, when once recites the verse, the *dalet* is conspicuously prolonged.

¹⁶ The Greek Matthew gospel (which opens the New Testament) begins with *b*, namely, *biblos geneseōs*, “The book of the generations,” an allusion to Genesis 5:1a’s Hebrew phrase *sefer toldot*, which the LXX renders *biblos geneseōs*, prefacing this with *autē hē* (“This is the”), which Matthew curiously omits, perhaps in order to imitate Genesis 1:1 with its first letter *beit*.

¹⁷ The *basmalah* is derived from Exodus 34:6’s “God, merciful and gracious.” This makes impossible the scholarly claim that the *basmalah*’s divine name *al-Rahman* is native Arabian rather than a Jewish borrowing.

¹⁸ *Midrash devarim rabbah*, ed. Saul Lieberman, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Shalem Books, 1992), 23 (*Devarim*, 23), cited in Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah* (Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy 18; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), p. 99.

of the Law and Logos.¹⁹ Philo even hints at a pre-existence for Moses.²⁰ Thus Laura S. Lieber is correct when she concludes as follows: “Neither Samaritan nor Jewish traditions develop a Logos theology, in which divine Word becomes divine Person incarnate, to the extent that Christianity does, but in writings from both communities we do see the divine Word personified both conceptually and performatively.”²¹

The Jewish Christianity associated with Jesus’ brother James the Just constitutes a mediating link between some Jewish and some Islamic traditions. There are, for example, definite parallels between the Letter of James and the Qur’an on the necessity of both believing and doing good works.²² There is also a degree of relation between Qur’an *sura* 112 and the teaching of the Greek bishop theologian Eunomius, whose doctrine has been integrated into the Syrian Ebionite-like Clementine literature.²³

To view historical influence and divine inspiration as incompatible is tantamount to a dualism that is itself incompatible with monotheism. To point out the Jewish and Christian language integrated into the *Fatiha*, for instance, is not to discount the Islamic text’s originality, but to enhance it by highlighting its unique adaptations.²⁴ But we must recognize that in the Qur’ān, *kitāb* does not generally denote a written document. As Alan Jones explains, “one can make a good case for arguing that ‘divine message’ would give a clearer indication of the meaning of *kitāb* than ‘scripture’ does. God does not transmit the divine message to His messengers in writing.”²⁵ In light of these points, we can conclude that *sura* 2:1’s opening declaration, “That is the book/revelation,” does not mean “This is the book/revelation.” “That” alludes to the heavenly book/revelation, not to an earthly copy thereof. Consequently, *dhālika l-kitābu* refers neither to a physical exemplar nor to an oral recitation of an earthly book called the Qur’an. The “book” is celestial, while *qur’ān* is an earthly recitation in Arabic which can in no way be simply identified with the celestial book.

To use Jones’ language, the book is an abstract entity, not a concrete one. Indeed, when the celestial book is recited on earth and written down, the result is not only revelation, but necessarily varying degrees of concealment as well. See *sura* 6:91a: “Say, ‘Who sent down the Scripture which

¹⁹ Cf. Deborah Forger, “Divine Embodiment of Philo of Alexandria,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* (2018): pp. 223-262.

²⁰ See Philo *Sacr.* 9 and further *Assumption of Moses* 1.14 referenced by M. David Litwa, “The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria,” *The Studia Philonica Annual* 26 (2014): pp. 1-27; here p. 10.

²¹ Laura S. Lieber, “Scripture Personified: Torah as Character in the Hymns of Marqah,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24/3 (2017): pp. 195-217; here p 196.

²² Cf. James 2:14-26 with e.g., Quran *suras* 2:82; 5:29; 18:30; 19:96; 25:70; 29:7, 58; 31:8; 98:7.

²³ See Samuel Zinner, “Qur’ān *Sūra* 112, Parmenides and Eunomius: A Textual-Philological Investigation,” *Journal of Higher Criticism*, forthcoming.

²⁴ The adaptations of Jewish language include the divine names “the Merciful” and “Lord of the worlds.” The phrase “day of judgment” reflects the Hebrew *yom ha-din*, a title for *Rosh ha-shanah*, but understood eschatologically. “The straight way” is a standard Hebrew biblical trope; compare Psalm 107:7, “And He led them by a straight way,” with *al-Fatiha* v. 6, “Guide us unto the straight way.” (Cf. also Ps 23:3: “He guideth me in straight paths for His name’s sake”). *Al-Fatiha*’s seven-fold structure agrees with that of the *Pater Noster*.

²⁵ Alan Jones, “The word made visible: Arabic script and the committing of the Qur’ān to writing,” in Chase F. Robinson, ed., *Texts, Documents and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D. S. Richards* (Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 45; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), pp. 1-16; here p. 10.

Moses brought as a light and a guidance to the people? You put it [on] parchments, revealing them, but concealing much.”²⁶ Jones concludes: “In the end none of the passages containing the root *k-t-b* can be said to encourage the writing of the divine message. . . .”²⁷ In all cases, revelation occurs in the mode of inspiration, not of dictation. The same may be said of the Tanakh, with the exception of the two tablets of stone, which God inscribed with his own finger. We thus move in that case from beyond even *dictatio* to a divine *digitus*.

To speak of history overlaps with talk of Mother Earth. Let us not forget that in Psalm 19 there are two sources of revelation, the book of creation (the book of the heavens and the earth), and the book of the Torah, in the specific personified form of Lady Torah, the bride of the Sun (as solar symbol of God) who like a hero-warrior goes out from his marriage chamber. Psalm 19 is an important illustration of Philo’s profoundly theological and philosophical teaching that consolidates both the natural law and the Law of Moses. Philo’s ultimate basis on this score is the legislator Moses’ act of opening the Law with an account of creation.²⁸

To return to the *Shema Israel*, with its three divine names YHWH ‘Eloheinu YHWH, the love toward God called for in Deuteronomy 6:5 is not an emotion (although it may generate such), but refers to Israel’s covenantal observance of the Torah’s commandments. Accordingly, the verses that follow Deuteronomy 6:4-5 speak of the duty to inculcate remembrance of “these words, which I command thee this day.” Equally important to note is that the *Shema Israel* is immediately preceded by the Ten Commandments transmitted by Deuteronomy 5. The first half of these commandments pertains to duties toward God, while the second half pertains to duties toward human beings; the two halves can be described respectively as legislation for religion and ethics. Similarly, Exodus 34:6’s threefold-divine title “LORD, LORD, God,” is immediately preceded by the story of the second set of two stone tablets for the re-giving of the Ten Commandments.

Looking at the history of Jewish esoteric thought, at the risk of being overly general, we could identify the following major developments, at least for the purposes of this Introduction. In the Second Temple period and continuing into the proto-Rabbinic period the mysticisms (literally “works”) of creation and of the divine chariot (*merkabah*) emerged. The Talmudic period saw the rise of Heikhalot (divine/celestial palaces) mysticism. Kabbalah flowered beginning in the 1200s CE, producing what is still the quintessential text of Jewish mysticism, the holy *Book of Zohar*. The so-called Rheinland Pietists were active in the same era. Isaac Luria (1534-1572) later produced a systematization of the earlier kabbalah which became the basis for the Hasidism that derives from the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) and which remains the standard form of Jewish mysticism in the 21st century.

Hasidic doctrine moves from monotheism to monism (without abandoning the former) on the basis of Deuteronomy 4:39: “know this day, and lay it to thy heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is nothing else (*‘eyn ‘od*).” This verse is anticipated with a slightly fuller phraseology in Deuteronomy 4:35: “Unto thee it was shown, that thou mightest know that the LORD, He is God (*YHWH hu’ ha’elohim*); there is nothing else than Him

²⁶ Cited in Alan Jones, “The word made visible,” p. 11.

²⁷ Alan Jones, “The word made visible,” p. 12.

²⁸ See Hindy Najman, “A Written Copy of the Law of Nature,” *The Studia Philonica Annual* 15 (2003): pp. 54–63; idem, “The Law of Nature and the Authority of the Mosaic Law,” *The Studia Philonica Annual* 11 (1999) 55–73. See also Richard A. Horsley, “The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero,” *Harvard Theological Review* 71/1-2 (1978): pp 35-59.

(‘eyn ‘od milbaddo).” Hasidic teachers point out that the final statement, ‘eyn ‘od milbaddo, says literally, “There is none other than him,” and not, “There is no other God but him.” The basic thought has later echoes in the Sufi doctrine of the Oneness of Being associated most famously with Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240 CE).

Of Deuteronomy 4:35-39, Isaiah Horowitz (ca. 1558-1630) in his *Shnei Luchot ha-Brit Toldot Adam, Beit ha-Behirah* 4 explains: “The meaning of this verse is not as some have said, that there is no other God than He. . . . Rather, the meaning is that there is nothing else in the world besides His Divinity.”²⁹ Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570), writes similarly in his *Shiur Qomah* 206b: “Do not attribute duality to God. . . . Do not say: ‘This is a stone and not God.’ God forbid! Rather, all existence is God. . . .”³⁰

Rachel Elior cites from *Sha ‘arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emrah* Ill:27 by Rabbi Aharon Rabbi Aharon Halevi of Starosselye, eminent disciple of Rabbi Shneur Zalman:

And the whole principle of intention is that His blessed divinity be made manifest, even specifically in the aspect of Yesh, which is the essential part of His intention, blessed be He. That is, that He shall be in the heaven above and on the earth below, and there be nothing else (Deuteronomy 4:39).³¹

Elsewhere Rachel Elior explains Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s doctrine on the same subject as follows:

Rabbi Shneur Zalman regarded the annihilation of the Yesh and the transformation of the Yesh to Ayin as the essential pivot of all human action: “Because the goal and foundation of all the commandments is to transform the Yesh into Ayin, that is, the annihilation of being” (*Likkutei Torah, Leviticus*, p. 83). He also viewed this as the primary goal of divine action: “The purpose of the creation of the worlds from nothingness to being was so that there would be a Yesh, and that the Yesh should be null” (*ibid., Deuteronomy*, 67a). To emphasize the centrality of the annihilation of the Yesh he stated: “The essence of idol worship is to take oneself for a Yesh” (*ibid., Leviticus*, 28a).³²

Elliot R. Wolfson offers even profounder insights into Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s monistic teachings:

Shneur Zalman set the tone by insisting that the acquisition of knowledge of the *seder hishtalshelut*—the technical term for the standard four worlds of kabbalistic ontology—is

²⁹ Daniel M. Horwitz, *A Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism Reader* (JPS Anthologies of Jewish Thought; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press / Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2016), p. 106.

³⁰ Daniel M. Horwitz, *A Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism Reader*, p. 106.

³¹ Cited in Rachel Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism*. Translated from Hebrew by Jeffrey M. Green (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), p 154.

³² Rachel Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism*, p. 144.

the “great commandment” (*miṣwah rabbah*) proclaimed in the verse “Know this day, and consider in your hearts that the Lord is God in heaven above and in earth below, there is no other” (Deut 4:39). By attaining such knowledge one acquires a “perfect heart” (*lev shalem*) and ascertains that the comprehension of existence entails divesting it of corporeality (*hassagat ha-meṣi’ut hu lehafṣiṭ mi-gashmiyyut*). To apprehend reality, one must strip it of its materiality, a reversal of the process of creation of something from nothing (*beri’ah yesh me-ayin*), “the annihilation of something into nothing” (*ha-biṭṭul yesh le-ayin*), to the point that “corporeality is eradicated into nothing in the extreme” (*ha-gashmiyyut baṭel le-ayin betakhlit*). As Shneur Zalman put it elsewhere, “The aspect of the nullification of something [*behinat biṭṭul ha-yesh*] is the opposite of the root of the matter of the break [*shevirah*], which was for the sake of the disclosure of the light precisely in the aspect of something [*hitgallut ha-or li-vehinat yesh dawqa*].” Yet, it is this inverse mirroring that facilitates the causal connection between the “nullification of something into nothing” (*biṭṭul ha-yesh le-ayin*) and the “drawing of nothing into something” (*hamshakhat ayin le-yesh*). Only when one sees from the vantage point of this double extinction—the nothing becoming something that is nothing—does one comprehend the far-reaching monopsychic (as opposed to the conventional monotheistic) meaning of the verse from Deuteronomy proclaiming that apart from God there is no other, that is, appearances notwithstanding, there appears to be no being (*mahut*) but the “actual nothing” (*ayin mammash*) that everything is apparently. In the essence of this void, the substance of all discriminate beings, including the personal God of biblical and rabbinic Judaism, is rendered insubstantial. Not to advance to this stage is to allow theism to elide into idolatry.³³

In the same insightful study, Wolfson traces the following reverberations of Rabbi Schneerson’s Deuteronomy 4-based monistic teaching:

Yoel Kahn, one of the men who were delegated with the responsibility to reiterate and to write down the oral discourses of the seventh Rebbe, cogently observed, “The divine truth is that there is nothing outside of the blessed holy One—‘there is none beside him’ (Deut 4:35). . . . This is the ‘knowledge of the blessed holy One,’ but in the sensible world there is a reverse discernment. The world is a ‘world of deceit’ [*alma de-shiqra*], and the deceit that is in it is not only that people in the world lie, but that the essence of the appearance of the world as an autonomous reality is a deceit.” Kahn goes on to say that through observance of the commandments and study of the Torah, especially the inner meaning of the text, the Jewish people are granted the capacity to discover that “all of existence is for the sake of Israel and the Torah, and they can even cause this discernment to penetrate into the world itself, and thus peace is achieved in the world—for even the world that appears as a reality separate from God senses that the truth is that ‘there is none beside him.’”³⁴

Rabbi Schneerson’s monistic teaching by no means denies the being of the worlds in any unqualified sense. As Wolfson writes:

³³ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 80-81.

³⁴ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, pp. 138-139.

As Schneerson put it in the *Quntres Inyanah shel Torat ha-Hasidut*: “The matter of the unity that ‘there is none beside him’ (Deut 4:35) is not that the worlds have no being, but rather that the worlds themselves as they are found in their being (and delimited by the taxonomy of time and space) are united in the ultimate unification in the essence of the light of the Infinite, blessed be he [meyuhadim hem be-takhlit ha-yihud be-aṣmut or ein sof barukh hu].³⁵

Wolfson cites yet another statement from Schneerson’s monism doctrine: “. . . ‘You have come to see that the Lord alone is God, that there is none beside him’ (Deut 4:35), that is, to fathom that there is no reality but the nondifferentiated One.”³⁶ Wolfson brings attention to the same basic teaching in Schneerson’s *Liqqutei Sihot*, 30:158–159, which shows that the doctrine of monism’s qualifications are of a dialectical nature which by no means lessens the teaching’s radicalness:

The complete truth is that there is no existence to anything in the world apart from him, may he be blessed (and if it does not appear so to the eyes it is only on account of the concealment of the face that covers the truth). . . . The entire reality of the adversary [*ha-menagged*] is merely due to the concealment that covers the truth, for ‘there is none beside him’ (Deut 4:35), and nothing in the world has existence apart from him, may he be blessed. Hence, if a man cleaves to God to the point that his true unity, may he be blessed, is revealed in him, the reality of the adversary is abolished, as the darkness that is pushed away before the light, for, in truth, it has no existence at all.³⁷

In post-Tanakh Jewish texts monism appears in the Qumran *Damascus Document*, “Blessed are you, you who are the all,” and in Sirach 43:27: “Though we speak much we cannot reach the end, and the sum of our words is: ‘He is the all.’” (RSV)

Philo of Alexandria comments on Deuteronomy 4:39 in *Leg. All.* 3:4, 82 and in *Migr.* 182f. Max Jammer supplies the background to Philo’s thought on this topic by citing Aristobulus, “The power of God is through all things,” and Elazar in the *Letter of Aristeas*, “There is only one God . . . His power [*dynamis*] is manifested throughout the universe, since every place is filled with His might.”³⁸ Jammer then turns to Philo’s thought:

In conformity with these ideas, Philo interprets Deuteronomy 4:39, “God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath,” as meaning not God Himself, but His forces in the sky and on the earth. Philo says: “He has made His forces extend through earth and water, air and heaven, and left no part of the universe destitute, and by uniting all with all, has bound them fast with invisible bonds.” [Conf. 136] Philo thus postulates the existence of invisible bonds of forces throughout the universe, as did the Stoa. . . . For Philo the God of the Bible remained a Personal God, although not personified. He rejected the Stoic conception of

³⁵ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 222.

³⁶ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 276.

³⁷ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, p. 349.

³⁸ Max Jammer, *Concepts of Force* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1962), p. 48.

force as implying that the forces of God are immanent only in the world and precluding the existence of incorporeal being outside the world.³⁹

It will be instructive to cite at fuller length the passages from Philo to which Jammer refers. First is *Confusion of Tongues* 136-138:

136 But all places are filled at once by God, who surrounds them all and is not surrounded by any of them, to whom alone it is possible to be everywhere and also nowhere. Nowhere, because he himself created place and space at the same time that he created bodies, and it is impious to say that the Creator is contained in anything that he has created. Again, he is everywhere, because, having extended his powers so as to make them pervade earth, and water, and air, and heaven, he has left no portion of the world desolate, but, having collected everything together, he has bound them with chains which cannot be burst, so that they are never emancipated, on which account he is especially to be praised with hymns.

137 For that which is higher than all powers is understood to exceed them, not merely in the fact of its existence. But the power of this being which made and arranged everything is with perfect truth called God, and it contains everything in its bosom, and pervades every portion of the universe.

138 But the divine being, both invisible and incomprehensible, is indeed everywhere, but still, in truth, he is nowhere visible or comprehensible. But when he says, “I am he who stands before thee” he appears indeed to be displayed and to be comprehended, though before any exhibition or conception he was superior to all created things. (Yonge)

Next is Philo's *Migration of Abraham* 182-183:

182 On which account even though it may be said somewhere in the declaration of the law, “God is in the heaven above, and in the earth beneath,” let no one suppose that God is here spoken of according to his essence. For the living God contains everything, and it is impiety to suppose that he is contained by any thing, but what is meant is, that his power according to which he made, and arranged, and established the universe, is both in heaven and earth.

183 And this, to speak correctly, is goodness, which has driven away from itself envy, which hates virtue and detests what is good, and which generates those virtues by which it has brought all existing things into existence and exhibited them as they are. Since the living God is indeed conceived of in opinion everywhere, but in real truth he is seen nowhere; so that divine scripture is most completely true in which it is said, “Here am I,” speaking of him who cannot be shown as if he were being shown, of “him who is invisible as if he were visible, before thou Existedst.” (Exod 17:6) For he proceeds onward before the created universe, and outside of it, and not contained or borne onward in any of the things whose existence began after his. (Yonge)

³⁹ Max Jammer, *Concepts of Force*, p. 8. On Philo's teachings about the Logos and the various divine “powers,” see Peter Frick, *The Concept of Divine Providence in the Thought of Philo of Alexandria*. PhD Dissertation, McMaster University, 1997.

Last is Philo's *Allegorical Interpretation* 2:4, 82:

4 And let us in the next place consider how any one is said to be concealed from God; but unless any one receives this as an allegorical saying it would be impossible to comprehend what is here stated. For God has completed everything and has penetrated every thing, and has left no one of all his works empty or deserted. What kind of place then can any one occupy in which God is not? And Moses testifies to this in other passages, when he says, "God is in the heaven above, and in the earth beneath; and there is nothing anywhere but He." (Deut 4:39) And in another place he speaks in this manner, "I stood here before you did." (Exod 17:6) For God is of older date than any created being, and he will be everywhere, so that it cannot be possible for any one to be concealed from him.

(82) But Melchisedek shall bring forward wine instead of water, and shall give your souls to drink, and shall cheer them with unmixed wine, in order that they may be wholly occupied with a divine intoxication, more sober than sobriety itself. For reason is a priest, having, as its inheritance the true God, and entertaining lofty and sublime and magnificent ideas about him, "for he is the priest of the most high God." (Gen 14:18) Not that there is any other God who is not the most high; for God being one, "is in the heaven above, and in the earth beneath, and there is no other besides Him." (Deut 4:39) But he sets in motion the notion of the Most High, from his conceiving of God not in a low and grovelling spirit, but in one of exceeding greatness, and exceeding sublimity, apart from any conceptions of matter.

(Yonge)

The monistic doctrine of the unity of being finds expression in early Christian literature as well. Especially pertinent is *Acts of Peter* 39, here modified from M. R. James' translation:

You are the All and the All is in you: and you are, and there is nothing else that is except you only. Unto him therefore do you also, brethren, flee, and if you learn that in him alone you exist, you shall obtain those things whereof he says unto you: "which neither eye has seen nor ear heard, neither have they entered into the heart of man."

As I remarked above, at a later time the Sufi doctrine of the unity or oneness of being, which reached its apex in the writings of Ibn al-Arabi, continued the Jewish and Christian precedents, which are largely based on a Platonic understanding of Deuteronomy 4.

Stefan C. Reif has highlighted the dangers to ethics (including the Golden Rule) caused by Christian obsession with theology.⁴⁰ Leo Baeck has written beautifully on Judaism as principally (although not entirely) ethics.⁴¹ Baeck's major works began with an emphasis on essence and ended on existence, a shift from abstract to concrete. Ironically and profoundly, as Baeck increasingly emphasized concrete existence, his respect for and understanding of Jewish mysticism deepened. This was possible because Baeck recognized that Jewish mysticism or esoteric traditions are rooted in the concrete history and lived experience of Israel, especially in the domain of commandment

⁴⁰ Stefan C. Reif, "A Jewish Response," in Peter Baelz et al., *Is Christianity Credible?* (London: Eppworth Press, 1981), pp. 37-45.

⁴¹ See Leo Baeck, *The Essence of Judaism*. Translated by Victor Grubwieser and Leonard Pearl (London: Macmillan, 1936); idem,

based in Torah. From Baeck's Neo-Kantian perspective, Judaism is not so much a doctrinal faith but a faithfulness to God and to humanity created in the divine image.

Michael Wyschogrod writes of Judaism and faithfulness in the context of recalling "the 'Great Beast,' the term Simone Weil applied to the collective whose rule she found intolerable in Judaism":⁴²

It is strange that the bitter assault on Judaism launched by Simone Weil in our century came at a time when her criticisms were least justified. The spirit of the Great Beast of our day hovers over the mass of Jews whose uprootedness from the sacralities of the past reduces them to a degree of contemporaneity that makes their participation and absorption into the mass public of the day natural and inevitable. The minority of Jews that clings to its past, by this very act resists the current and disengages itself from the real Great Beast of our time. To some extent it is much more probable today than ever before that a Jew who remains faithful to the covenant in this day and age is acting out of conscience instead of social conformity.

To resist the profound forces that work to level differences between one faith and another, one community and another, is no easy task and it is for this reason that the faithful Jew, whether he likes it or not, is forced into a degree of individuality much greater than ever before. In this environment, as an individual swimming against the stream, the Judaism of our day can no longer dispense with conscience as part of our theological arsenal. If the effect of this is that we thereby move into the age of conscience, it is a risk that we must be willing to accept because to insist on a Judaism that remains deaf to this voice is even more perilous.⁴³

Wyschogrod continues:

Human conscience in general and Jewish conscience in particular are not formed in a vacuum. No man is naturally endowed with an unerring conscience which miraculously leads him to the right irrespective of the knowledge available to him or unavailable to him. Without in any way diminishing the significance of conscience, we maintain that it can be sensitized and developed by the tradition of revelation to which the people of Israel are witness and without which Jewish conscience is impoverished and isolated, cut off from its source of historic sustenance. The study of Torah is therefore a fundamental dictate of Jewish conscience. And because this is so, while no person is guilty for following his conscience, he may be guilty for not giving a hearing to the voices of his tradition which speak to him across the ages and which at least purport to echo the voice of Sinai. Whether they will be perceived by him as such is a matter between him, his conscience and God. But that he ought to try to listen is a dictate of conscience.⁴⁴

⁴² Michael Wyschogrod, "Judaism and Conscience," in Asher Pinkel, Lawrence Frizzell, eds., *Standing Before God: Studies on Prayer in Scriptures and in Tradition. With Essays in Honor of John M. Oesterreicher* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1981), pp. 313-328; here p. 314.

⁴³ Michael Wyschogrod, "Judaism and Conscience," p. 326.

⁴⁴ Michael Wyschogrod, "Judaism and Conscience," p. 328.

Leo Strauss explains from a Nietzschean-based perspective that because the world involves unending mystery, cognition and its aims or goals forever remain incomplete and thus serve to highlight the continuing and open possibility of God. Based on this insight, Strauss then proposes that if God remains a possibility, so does the possibility that God could, or even has already, bequeathed revelation. Kenneth Hart Green explains that according to Strauss, Spinoza “applied to Judaism the critique of religion initiated by Machiavelli, and executed by Bodin, Bacon, Descartes, and Hobbes.”⁴⁵ However, Spinoza’s

completed system, rather than being a refutation of revelation, presupposes its falsity from the very first page of the *Ethics*. Thus Spinoza never refutes it *in* the system, since its falsity is presupposed *by* the system.

But why is it necessary for Spinoza to simply presuppose such falsity? What premise is so difficult to refute or even to face directly? To Strauss, the difficulty lies in the following concept: God as unfathomable will. If God is unfathomable will because He is omnipotent, Who reveals Himself as He wills, revelation is possible. It could be refuted only if man could attain the clear and distinct knowledge of the whole, the knowledge which Spinoza strives to contain in the *Ethics*, the knowledge which in principle makes all causes explicable and hence renders all things intelligible. In a completely comprehensible universe, the mysterious God would be a superfluous hypothesis. Since, according to Strauss, Spinoza never adequately demonstrates his view, the system presented in the *Ethics*, “the clear and distinct account of everything . . . remains fundamentally hypothetical. As a consequence, its cognitive status is not different from that of the orthodox account.” For this reason, Spinoza cannot refute, or even “legitimately deny” the *possibility* of the theological view presented in the Bible—i.e., there is then no justification whatever for his not considering the revealing God and revelation *per se* as possibly the truth.⁴⁶

In the current age of the so-called New Atheism, it is worth recalling the American poet Robert Frost’s comments in a 1952 interview with Hungarian author Bela Kornitzer:

The better half of the world of our daily life can’t be made a science of. . . . We’ve been led to expect more of science than it could perform. . . . You will hear a confident scientist say that . . . science has gone so far that you don’t dare to say how much further it might not go. But right here and now I’m telling you that the whole half of our lives can’t be made a science of, can’t ever be made a science of.⁴⁷

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s following remarks from his essay “The Over-Soul” remain as pertinent and valid as when they were first published in 1841:

⁴⁵ In Leo Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*. Edited with an Introduction by Kenneth Hart Green (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1997), p. 9.

⁴⁶ In Leo Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁷ A Conversation with Robert Frost and Bela Kornitzer (National Broadcasting Company, 1952).

Why do men feel that the natural history of man has never been written, but he is always leaving behind what you have said of him, and it becomes old, and books of metaphysics worthless? The philosophy of six thousand years has not searched the chambers and magazines of the soul. In its experiments there has always remained, in the last analysis, a residuum it could not resolve. Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descending into us from we know not whence. The most exact calculator has no prescience that somewhat incalculable may not balk the very next moment. I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine.

As with events, so is it with thoughts. When I watch that flowing river, which, out of regions I see not, pours for a season its streams into me, I see that I am a pensioner; not a cause, but a surprised spectator of this ethereal water; that I desire and look up, and put myself in the attitude of reception, but from some alien energy the visions come.⁴⁸

Just as it was in 1841, so even today while science has been able to chart a multitude of correlations between brain activity and various mental and emotional states, science has still not been able adequately to explain consciousness or its origins. Although today we could put the psychological label of the unconscious or subconscious onto Emerson's hidden and unseen stream and river of events and thoughts, this label by no means adequately explains its referent, let alone dissolves its mystery or plumbs its depths. We have every reason to expect that Emerson's words will be just as valid and accurate in a thousand years from now as they are today.

In a 2007 interview conducted by Jann Wenner, Bob Dylan gave the following response when asked about faith and religion: "Religion is something that is mostly outward appearance. Faith is a different thing. . . . Faith doesn't have a name. It doesn't have a category. It's oblique, so it's unspeakable. We degrade faith by talking about religion."⁴⁹ The most traditional Jewish kabbalist could not have expressed the matter more incisively. The obliqueness of faith is grounded in the never-ending depths of the hidden stream and river of which Emerson wrote in "The Over-Soul."

Kenneth Seeskin draws a line that connects transcendence and annihilation: "If God is the source of all existence, and God is incomprehensible, then scepticism about existence is unavoidable. In the words of Emmanuel Levinas: 'The infinite affects thought by devastating it.'"⁵⁰ Mysticism always ends in a divine a/theism (I like to pronounce this as awe-theism). The Eyn Sof is the infinite nothing. Whatever ineffable realities words like "God" hint at, the words and accompanying concepts themselves fail to arrive at their goals. This is to be expected, given that words and ideas are things, while their referents are nothings. As such, these words and concepts must with awe be left behind at some stage. Awe expressed in more archaic language is fear, a word that is unjustifiably criticized when it appears in older biblical translations in phrases such as "the

⁴⁸ Brooks Atkinson, ed., *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (The Modern Library; New York: Random House, 1950), pp. 261-262.

⁴⁹ "Bob Dylan on the Atomic Bomb, Neil Young and religion with Jann Wenner": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WA0S2_HQ5o&t=91s>; accessed 19 Jan. 2021. For a transcript, see Jann S. Wenner, "Bob Dylan Hits the Big Themes, From Religion to the Atomic Age," *Rolling Stone* (2007): <<https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/bob-dylan-hits-the-big-themes-from-religion-to-the-atomic-age-242544/>>.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Seeskin, "From Monotheism to Scepticism and Back Again," *Melilah: Atheism, Scepticism and Challenges to Monotheism* 12 (2015): pp. 5-13; here p. 5.

fear of the LORD.” At some stage we must be afraid to talk of the LORD God. In part this involves the traditional ban on pronouncing the Tetragrammaton. But in larger part it involves the righteous fear to substitute fantasy with reality.

What Emerson calls a stream and river, the Hebrew Bible calls the Torah. The earthly Torah is expressed in and with human language with its inherent limitations. And yet the earthly Torah embodies the heavenly Torah, which is beyond the limitations of language or speech within history. It is precisely because language (either as external speech or as internal thought) can never fully exhaust or describe its referents that the Torah remains oblique, and this obliqueness is the Torah’s potentially infinite depths. Because of her rootedness in the heavenly Torah, the Mosaic Torah still emanates from Mount Sinai. Her ongoing emanation from Sinai is expressed in the liturgical cycle that year after year continues to revolve like a stationary yet rotating *merkabah* wheel, which obliquely captures something both of time and of eternity.

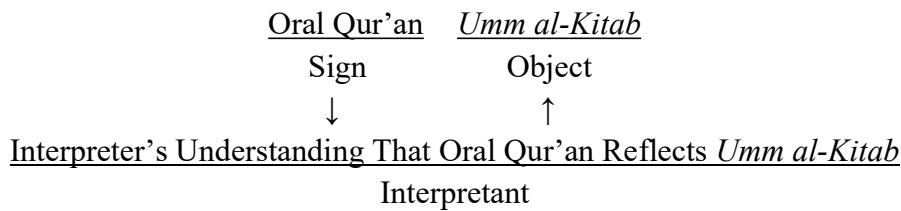
2. The Semiotics of Inliteration of the *Umm al-Kitab* (Mother of the Book) and Sacred Time Dilation

According to Christian theology, the Word, the *logos*, undergoes incarnation by being united in perfect unity with human nature. For Islamic theologies, the Word (*kalima, amr*),⁵¹ undergoes not incarnation, but inliteration by being perfectly united not with human nature, but with human language, in this specific instance, Arabic speech. The divine uncreated Word descends in order to be inliterated in the created words of Arabic. Judaism also knows of such a sacred reality, namely, the inliteration of the preexistent Torah in the temporal, earthly Torah of Moses. In the Jewish scriptures, preexistent Hokhmah, Lady Wisdom, which coincides with the preexistent Torah, descends to the world in order to “tabernacle” within and to dwell among humanity in personified and “inliterated” modes. Indeed, Lady Wisdom is the ultimate source, at least historically viewed, of the Christian *logos* doctrine and Islamic traditions in their most basic level.

The divine descent of the *Umm al-Kitab*, the Mother of the Book, took place upon the night of *al-Qadr*, which is “better than a thousand months” (*sura al-Qadr* 3). The descent of the eternal Word into time must relativize time so that one night equals more than a thousand months. In other words, the descent of the eternal into time involves not ordinary secular, historical time, but “sacred” time, a mode of *tempus* allowing humans who hear the word in temporality to participate in the eternal and divine realities.

Yet the concept of inliteration, valid insofar or inasmuch as it accords with the symbolism of the preexistent Book, is somewhat incomplete in an Islamic context, given that the original manifestation of the Qur'an is oral rather than written. The latter belongs as to origin not to a written, “literate” mode, but is rather a “spoken” reality in the domain of language and speech. Since the Qur'an describes itself repeatedly as a “sign,” or *aya*, and since each verse is called an *aya-sign*, we might be able to find a helpful descriptive label for the Qur'an in the field of semiotics. More fundamental than the Qur'an as an example of inliteration is the oral Qur'an as semiosis. Of the semiotic sign classes, (isomorphic) icon, index, and symbol (the latter constituted through social convention or agreement), index is the class which in a theological manner most fittingly parallels the entry of the supra-sensible Word into manifestation as sensible words. We could then refer to the oral manifestation of the Qur'an as the “indexation” of the *Umm al-Kitab*. The semiotic model of indexicality is the class that most appropriately approximates the supra-ontological and ontological continuity between the Word and words, or idea and articulation, or yet again, between the conceptual and the sonic. The triadic semiotic schema involved in this instance may be represented as follows:

⁵¹ Arabic *amr*, although usually translated as “command,” is the equivalent of the cognate Aramaic word *memra*, “Word,” which is used in a divine personified sense in the Jewish *Targumim*. In both Hebrew and Arabic the semantic field of the concept of “word” contains the aspect of “command.”



The anti-closure dynamic of interpretant reflective infinity, that is, the process by which an act of interpretation gives rise to an unending series of interpretative reflections, *in potentia* at least, explains the hermeneutically inexhaustible depths of all sacred texts and authentically transcendent “literary” works. The Neoplatonic philosophers’ recognition of the Homeric poetic corpus’ sacred status is therefore justified from this perspective in light of the *Odyssey*’s and *Iliad*’s resistance to plenary or exhaustive exegesis.⁵²

A word is a sonic corpus; prior to the oral Qur’an is the unspoken, unarticulated Qur’an, the “thought” Qur’an, in the mind of the Prophet. This communication of the *Umm al-Kitab* to the mind of the Prophet naturally involves a central cognitive mystery and raises the question of the relations between thought and articulation in speech, which relates to the field of psycho-linguistics. The many schools of interpretation within psycho-linguistics demonstrate that profane science is far from solving the mysteries of thought and language production. Theologically viewed, the dynamics of the descent of the *Umm al-Kitab* are left at the level of mystery in the *al-Qadr sura*. Ultimately the descent of the Word is beyond explanation, remaining on the sensible plane a sacred mystery.

The comments presented thus far must be further qualified. I do not intend to imply that the *Umm al-Kitab* comprises the divine thought or thoughts as such, in contrast to the earthly recitation which comprises speech. Even the terminology of the “heavenly” divine “Word” that precedes the earthly divine word is not to be taken too literally. This is because the *Umm al-Kitab* is formless insofar as either thought or word is concerned. Strictly speaking, the *Umm al-Kitab* is both pre-conceptual and pre-verbal. There are no words (nor thoughts) in the *Umm al-Kitab*. Symbolically speaking, which is the only way one can speak of these matters, the *Umm al-Kitab* comprises the letters of the divine alphabet, yet not in an unchanging, static ordered sequence from ‘alef’ alif to tav/tā’. Rather, the pre-conceptual, pre-verbal *Umm al-Kitab* is a matrix that configures various groupings of the letters of the divine alphabet; these groupings do not yet form words.

At this stage the letters of the divine alphabet simultaneously function numerically, based on the well-known paradigm ‘alef’ alif = 1, beth/ba’ = 2, etc. Indeed, at the stage of the *Umm al-Kitab*, the divine letters primarily function numerically, and because number or numerosity originates in a spatial dimension and capacity,⁵³ the *Umm al-Kitab* must be correlated with spatiality. This divine level generates proto-thought, not thought proper, which is why we must call the *Umm al-Kitab* pre-conceptual. The numerical letters of the divine alphabet thus pertain to spatiality, which has as a subset the forms or shapes of the “divine” geometry. By contrast, language or speech pertains

⁵² On the sacred dimensions of the Homeric corpus, see Algis Uždavinys, “From Homer to the Glorious Qur’an: Hermeneutical Strategies in the Hellenic and Islamic Traditions,” in *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity* 11 (2003): pp. 79-111.

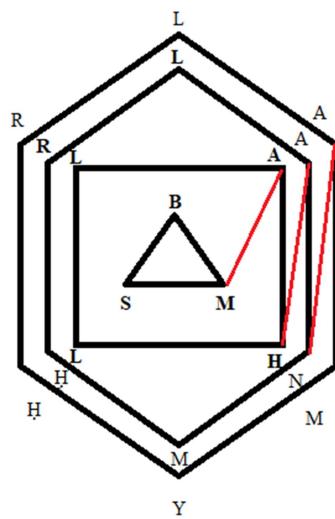
⁵³ See Maria Dolores deHevia, Luisa Girelli and Viola Macchi Cassia, “Minds without language represent number through space: origins of the mental number line,” *Frontiers in Psychology* Volume 3 | Article 466 (October 2012): pp. 1-4; doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00466.

primarily to temporality, hence the thoroughgoing presence and function of “tense” in language. Phrased differently, thought is spatial (at least most generally speaking), while language is temporal.

That thought and speech involve different brain areas does not necessarily mean that we can cleanly separate the two functions. Not only are thought and speech areas in the brain closely parallel to each other, we cannot overlook that both are also operatively present in a single organ, the brain. The separate areas merely indicate different developmental trajectories in biological evolutionary history for thought and speech, not that they do not somehow operate in concert, or that one could somehow exist without the other, at least functionally. One cannot talk without thinking, even if much of the thought occurs at an unconscious level marked by automaticity. The more advanced speech is, the more advanced thought can be. An infant’s thought level develops in accord with speech (or some form of language) capacity, not vice versa. One cannot have highly advanced or developed thought without highly developed or complex speech or language in some form, whether it be sonic or by sign. A human’s thought is basically linguistic, while a dog’s thought is non-linguistic and is essentially based on processing of visual, auditory, and tactile sensory data.⁵⁴ I would add emotional data to this list as well.

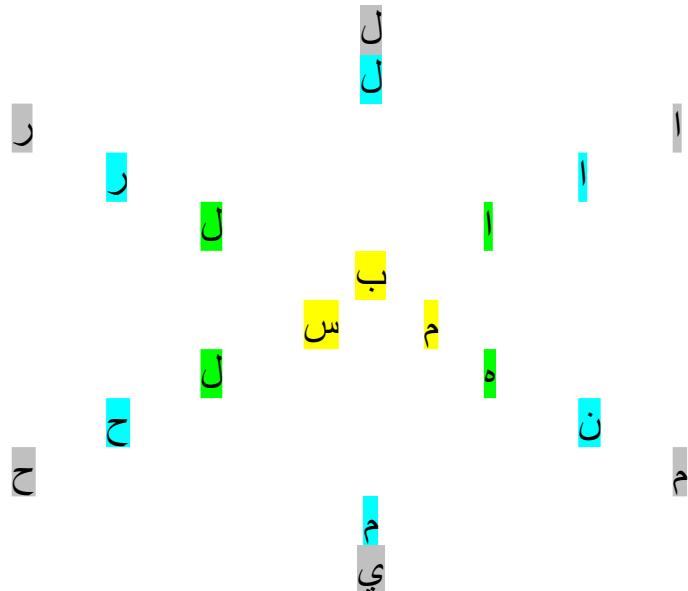
An example of the divine geometry is the Pythagorean insight $1+2+3+4=10$, the sacred decad, that is ‘alef/’alif + beth/ba’ + gimel/jim + dalet/dal = yod/ya’. Thus *yod* is the first letter of the sacred Tetragrammaton. The first four numbers accord geometrically with a square. The decad that results from this square is a triangle containing ten dots, the tetractys. Further, the sum of the numbers 1 through 10 is 55, which coincides with the ordinal value of the Hebrew divine name רחמן, as does its Arabic cognate رَحْمَن, which not coincidentally forms the title of Qur’an *sura* 55.

One method of recovering the geometric forms underlying a letter-text would be to represent the letter-groups that comprise the text’s respective words as geometric shapes. For instance, a three-letter word is a triangle, a four-letter word is a square, etc. Performing this operation on the *basmala*, for example, produces the following result, which I will first depict with accompanying transliterated letters for the sake of non-Arabic readers:

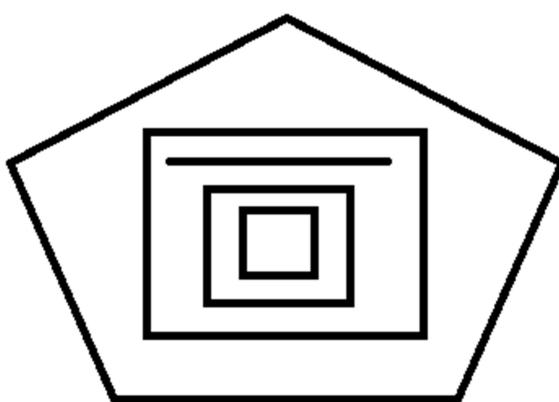


Notice how several of the letters line up diagonally, which I will now depict in Arabic script:

⁵⁴ This is not to overlook that a dog can certainly hear human linguistic speech and process it in various ways.



If we perform the same operation with the 19 Hebrew letters that are echoed in the 19 Arabic letters of the *basmala*, namely, Exodus 34:6's, יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים וּחֶנְן, “YHWH YHWH God, merciful and gracious,” we obtain the following geometric configuration, namely, a square within a square below a horizontal line enclosed by a third square, all encompassed by a pentagon:



In psycho-linguistics, sense-based knowledge, that is, knowledge gained by experience, is called declarative knowledge. Yet as the “rationalist” school of linguistics argues, there must be a supra-sensorial base or ground of knowledge by which the human mind interprets this sensorial input. In philosophy, theology and metaphysics this supra-sensorial foundation could be termed “transcendent.” The problematic involved here is not as crassly simplistic as suggested by the older

notions of a supposed oppositional polarity between Aristotelian sense-based knowledge and Platonic preexistent archetypal knowledge. Scholarship in general has insufficiently emphasized in this context that Aristotle's theory of connatural, pre-conceptual knowledge overlaps to a degree with Plato's concept of *a priori* knowledge, especially when Plato's language is taken for what it is, namely, a richly variegated mixture of allegory, metaphor, and analogy. There must be a supra-sensorial mechanism by which sensorial input is processed, and as psycholinguists theorize, this processing dynamic must involve some level and some sort of autonomy and automaticity.

Certain theological models would explain the transcendent dimension of the human mind as the presence in human consciousness of the divine "spirit." And it is fitting in this model that according to both the Qur'anic and Gospel narratives, the Word is conveyed to humanity by the "spirit," which is to say that it is none other than God who bestows the Eternal Word upon humanity in temporality. But the Word that shares in temporality remains the Eternal Word, even though clothed in created words; and by virtue of the fact that in the process of "incarnation" or "inliteration" the continuity between the Eternal Word and temporalized words is not severed, the "time" in which the Eternal Word appears cannot be "ordinary" time, but must be sacred time, somewhat along the lines of the scholastic notion of the *aevum*. This sacred dimension or mode of time, this non-ordinary aspect of temporality, is denoted by the *al-Qadr sura* in the following line: "This night of majesty is better than a thousand months."⁵⁵ "Better" must involve, in this context, both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, both the qualitative "spiritual" or sacred time, and quantitative time dilation, analogically understood.

When the eternal "encounters" the temporal, something akin to time dilation must occur, and perhaps it is this dynamic which might help explain the concept of realized eschatology. John 5:25: "Amen, amen I say unto you, that the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the son of God, and they that hear shall live." To reformulate this saying: "The end of the world is coming and now is." This teaching on realized eschatology is even more forcefully advanced in the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas* logion 51: "His disciples said to him: 'When will the day come when the dead will rest? and on what day will the new cosmos come?' He said this to them: 'What you are looking for has already come, but you do not see it.'" A modern Jewish example would be Franz Kafka's parable "Before the Law." A seeker sits in front of the Gate of the Torah, the guard barring the seeker's entry through the gate. The seeker waits his entire lifetime at the gate, engaging the gate-keeper. At long last, the seeker dies. The implication is that it was precisely by being outside that the seeker was all the time actually inside the gate. The operative factor was the seeker's engagement in conversation with the gate-keeper.

Eternity is, or at least entails, the absence of time, whereas in realized eschatology all time tenses and their absence (which is to say their simultaneous co-existence) are involved. These imply eternity per se and mediated or participated eternity. Both must apply to the contingent order, since pure unmediated eternity is applicable only to the divine as *Ipsum Esse*. In the contingent order, eternity per se must always accompany or be manifested in the mode of a participated eternity.

⁵⁵ The term *qadr* according to standard lexica means "weight," "degree," "quantity," "power," "glory." "Glory" in this context means "full of weight." As Schedl writes: "Certainly in this night with the descent of the Qur'ān the destiny of many humans was determined, but not fate and determination are celebrated here, but rather the glory of this night." See Claus Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus. Die christologisch relevanten Texte des Korans neu übersetzt und erklärt* (Wien, Freiburg, Basel: Herder, 1978), p. 112.

“The end is coming and now is”; the “already” and “not yet” coexist, all time tenses are “simultaneously” present. This is reminiscent of time dilation wherein two temporal trajectories coexist, in separative mode at the local levels of the moving and (relatively) stationary objects respectively, yet in unitive mode when viewed against the backdrop of the cosmos as a whole, in which matrix both moving and stationary objects are entified.

Sacred time dilation: “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years” (2 Peter 3:8; cf. Psalm 90:4; Qur'an 32:5); “a day the measure of which is as fifty thousand years” (Qur'an 70:4). These divine sayings principally involve the Lord of revelation (“Being,” corresponding to the Hindu Ishvarah), since the *Ipsum Esse* (understood as the Platonic and Eastern Orthodox “Beyond-Being,” equivalent to the Upanishadic Nirguna-Brahman) has no “day,” dwelling as it does in strict eternity. It is by the divine spirit that we transcend time and realize our presence in the Eternal Now, the “day” of God, which is essentially timeless. The Holy Spirit is thus the Eternal Spirit, or the Spirit of Eternity, the divine power by whose means, according to the Qur'an, Jesus and all the Prophets spoke by inspiration:

O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember my favor unto thee and unto thy mother; how I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit, so that thou spakest unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity; and how I taught thee the scripture and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and how thou didst shape of clay as it were the likeness of a bird by my permission, and didst blow upon it and it was a bird by my permission, and thou didst heal him who was born blind and the leper by my permission; and how thou didst raise the dead, by my permission. . . (sura 5:110).

On the eternal day of doom, the spirit and angels ascend unto God, indicating that over aeons of time the ascent to salvation is accomplished through the spirit and the angels, who will speak by divine leave on the day of Judgment: “On the day when the angels and the spirit stand arrayed, they speak not, saving him whom the Beneficent alloweth and who speaketh right” (*sura* 73:38). On the day of Judgment, the spirit and angels ascend to God: “The angels and the spirit ascend unto him” (*sura* 70:4); on the night of revelation, they descend to the world, in order to bring creation upwards in ascent to God: “The angels and the spirit descend therein by leave of their lord with the Word in all its fullness” (*sura* 97:4). The world is integrated into the spirit, in whom creation will ascend to the One on the Day of Judgment. Peace and restoration reign in the night of contingency, of suffering, and of redemption, until the dawn of the Eternal day breaks in revelation. Enlightenment is effected by the spirit of God's Word of Command, the spirit of revelation—the revelation of attaining eternal beatitude through surrender:

They will ask thee concerning the spirit. say: the spirit is of the Word (*amr*) of my Lord, the knowledge of which ye have been vouchsafed little (*sura* 17:85).

The Exalter of ranks, the Lord of the throne. He casteth the spirit of his Word (*amr*) upon whom he will of his slaves, that he may warn of the day of meeting (*sura* 40:15).

And thus have We inspired in thee a spirit of Our Word (*amr*). Thou knewest not what the scripture was, nor what the Faith. But We have made it a light whereby We guide whom We

will of our bondmen. And lo! thou verily dost guide unto a right path. The path of God, unto Whom belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Do not all things reach God at last?⁵⁶ (*sura* 42:52-53).

“All things reach God at last,” on the final day, the Day of Judgment, the Eternal day, which is to say, the Eternal Now. Eternity seems far to us, but to God it is near: “. . . the doom . . . from God, Lord of the ascending stairways [whereby] the angels and the spirit ascend unto him in a day whereof the span is fifty thousand years. But be patient with a patience fair to see. lo! they behold it afar off while we behold it nigh” (*sura* 70:1-4). God is the beginning and the end; the end is present in the eternal now. Through the teaching of Prophetic truth, conveyed by the spirit, the eternal day is realized in the consciousness of humanity. “Say: the Holy Spirit hath revealed it from thy Lord with truth, that it may confirm those who believe, and as a guidance and good tidings for those who have surrendered” (*sura* 16:102).

Eternity is now; eternity ever is. The “reintegration” of contingent consciousness into the divine intellect brings to the human intellect transcendence of time. Those who discover the hidden truths will not taste death (see the *Gospel of Thomas incipit* and *logion* 1), because for them there is through transcendence an “escape” from time, in whose domain death holds sway, but in whose overcoming limitless life is found.

Sura 70:1-4’s period of fifty-thousand years agrees with Jewish traditions of the *shemittot*, the cosmic cycle of fifty-thousand years (composed of forty-nine millennia followed by a final millennium). Although this specific period of fifty-thousand years in Jewish literature first appears in the 1200s CE in Spanish kabbalistic sources, there can be little doubt that it is derived from much earlier Jewish oral tradition predating the Qur'an. In this instance, rather than the Qur'an influencing kabbalah, Jewish tradition has informed *sura* 70.

⁵⁶ Equipped with the correct philology of *amr*, we can now see certain correspondences in *aya* 52 between “spirit” and “word” on the one hand, and “scripture” and “faith” on the other. The inspiration of the spirit gives rise to the word, which encompasses the scripture, and which in turn is the source of faith.

3. Implicit Platonic Principles in Sacred Scripture: Three Speculative Essays

Essay I Platonic Themes in the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon

Preexistence of the Soul and Mediate (Delayed) Animation

Wisdom 8:20: “And whereas I was more good, I came to a body undefiled.”

The Wisdom of Solomon is a mid-first-century CE Jewish treatise written most likely in Alexandria, Egypt. The author could have been a student of Philo of Alexandria. Wisdom 8:20 would seem to imply or presuppose both preexistence of the soul and mediate (delayed) animation. Moreover, the preexistence of the soul implies as a correlate the “re-existence” of the soul, known variously in the traditions as the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, and resurrection, the three being but variations on a single theme. All three terms are symbols which refer to post mortem or eschatological realities, and both these states lie outside the temporal and spatial orders of existence, though these states and orders are certainly related in some mode of continuity. As a consequence, the post mortem and eschatological states can be described only symbolically, metaphorically, and analogically, which is to say, only indirectly, allusively, and elusively.

Divine Archetypes

Wisdom 9:8: “And hast commanded me to build a temple on thy holy mount, and an altar in the city of thy dwelling place, a resemblance of thy holy tabernacle, which thou hast prepared from the beginning.”

Letter to the Hebrews 8:2, 5: “the true tabernacle, which the Lord hath pitched, and not man . . . who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things. As it was answered to Moses, when he was to finish the tabernacle: See (saith he) that thou make all things according to the pattern which was shown thee on the mount.”

Plato’s doctrine of the divine archetypes is transparently compatible with the Wisdom of Solomon and the Letter to the Hebrews, both of which teach that the earthly Tabernacle or Temple is but a shadow of the “heavenly realities,” the scriptural phrase for Plato’s celestial preexistent divine archetypes. Therefore the scriptures endorse the traditional theosophical dictum, “as above, so below; as below, so above.”

Anthropological Dualism of Body and Soul

Wisdom 9:15: “For the corruptible body is a load on the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down the mind that museth upon many things.”

It is by now a cliché among modern biblical scholars that the Hellenistic anthropological dualism of body and spirit, or soul and body, stands in contradiction to the biblical, Semitic view of the human as psycho-somatic unity. Plato’s dualism is spurned as disjunctive, whilst biblical anthropology (as if there were not several) is designated as holistic. But the opposition thus erected between Hellenistic and Semitic anthropologies as a reputed absolute contradiction is upon further reflection revealed as a somewhat shallow posture. Through dialectical reasoning, one can transcend these opposites and unveil a synthesis which exposes the areas of mutual overlap, as well as their distinctive and legitimate contrastive emphases. Plato stresses the immortality of the soul, whereas the Hebrew scriptures stress the resurrection of the body. Yet the Jewish scriptures also know of immortal and disembodied souls, such as the familiar “shades” who dwell in Sheol. In fact, Richard C. Steiner’s recent work has shown that contrary to centuries of claims in both universities and seminaries (both Christian and Jewish) the Tanakh does contain the notion of disembodied souls.⁵⁷

Furthermore, Plato’s concept of the immortal soul is related to the idea of reincarnation, and in light of the common etymology overlapping the terminologies “resurrection of the flesh” and “re-in-carnation,” the immortality of the soul also stands in relation to resurrection.

In order to understand Platonic anthropological dualism more properly, one must first appreciate the divine Philosopher’s concept of matter. Plato and those who followed him, especially Plotinus, developed a distinction between two types of matter, which we can elucidate by means of the following contrastive list:

The Two Kinds of Matter

substantial	functional
fine	gross
pneuma	<i>soma/sarx</i>
intelligible	sensible
active	passive
divine/celestial	contingent
simplex	complex
incorporeal	corporeal
changeless	changing
undifferentiated	differentiated
polymorphous unity	multiplicity

Moreover, Plotinus observes concerning matter and the divine archetypes: “Both are engendered, in the sense that they have had a beginning, but unengendered in that this beginning is

⁵⁷ See Richard C. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls: The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East, with an appendix on the Katumuwa Inscription* (Ancient Near East Monographs 11; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015). Available online at: <https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9781628370775_OA.pdf>; accessed 18 Feb. 2021.

not in time: they have a derived being but by an eternal derivation” (*Enneads* II:4:5; Stephen MacKenna, B. S. Page translation). In *Enneads* II:4:16, Plotinus explains that matter is a non-existent existent, a privation of specific character, indeed an utter privation. In the same passage the great interpreter of Plato writes on the two kinds of matter: “The matter in the intellectual realm is an Existent, for there is nothing previous to it except the Beyond-Existence; but what precedes the matter of this sphere is Existence, by its alienism in regard to the beauty and good of Existence, matter is therefore a non-existent.” For Plotinus, matter is not evil per se, but it is evil in a merely relational sense with reference to the soul.

Furthermore, when a Platonist says that matter is evil, the word “evil” has quite a different meaning than when used in ordinary Christian discourse. *Enneads* I:8:12 illustrates this point: “To deny Evil a place among realities is necessarily to do away with the Good as well, and even to deny the existence of anything desirable. . . . Evil is not alone; by virtue of the nature of Good, the power of Good, it is not Evil only: it appears, necessarily, bound around with bonds of beauty, like some captive bound in fetters of gold. . . .” This is reminiscent of the rabbinical description of the sex drive as a manifestation of the *yetser hara*, the “evil” inclination in human nature, which though called “evil” is in actuality good, for without it, there would be no perpetuation of the human species, as the ancient Rabbis were fond of reminding their audiences. Therefore, both Plotinus and the Rabbis employ the word “evil,” in this context at least, in quite a different sense than do Christian theologians who like to denounce Hellenistic anthropological dualism.

According to Plotinus, *Enneads* IV:5:1, the soul’s descent into matter is but a misdirected desire for the good. The emphasis is on the good, not the misdirection, so that for Plotinus matter cannot be intrinsically “evil” in the usual Christian sense. *Enneads* I:2:1: “Since Evil is here ‘haunting this world by necessary law,’ and it is the soul’s design to escape from Evil, we must escape hence. But what is this escape? ‘in attaining likeness to God’, we read. And this is explained as ‘becoming just and holy, living by Wisdom.’” The symbol of the soul transcending matter is functionally equivalent to the scriptural symbols of holistic salvation. Genesis 1 proclaims all creation is good; yet the Bible also speaks of evil in the cosmos. Plato and Plotinus speak of the demiurge as good and beneficent, and Plotinus vigorously combated the idea of an evil demiurge as proposed by some Gnostics. So Hellenism and the Bible are not at all that far apart on the question of evil and matter. Finally, that physicality cannot be unconditionally positive in every aspect, anyone can recognize who has been plagued by any of the multitude of privations of the good which afflict humanity, from the common cold to mortality.

Father of the World as Creative Demiurge

Wisdom 10:1: “She [Lady Wisdom] preserved him who was the father of the world [i.e., Adam], that was first formed by God, when he was created alone. . . .”

For Plato and the Neoplatonists, the title “father of the world” denotes the demiurge. In Wisdom 10:1, Adam is designated the demiurge, the father of the world. The divine Lady Wisdom preserves him from sin. In Philonic terms, this is the sinless, spiritual Adam, not the earthly Adam (the spiritual Adam is the celestial Adam known as the *Adam Kadmon* in Kabbalism). The demiurge for Plato is the divine creator, fashioner of the cosmos out of preexistent formless matter by

contemplation of the eternal archetypes of the divine mind—though the demiurge is also equated with the divine mind. The demiurge is in a sense both created and uncreated.

Creation from Preexistent Formless Matter

Wisdom 11:18: “For thy almighty hand, which made the world of formless matter. . . .”

Paul’s various statements that all things are from, in, and through God, such as Romans 11:36, indicate that emanationism overlaps with the biblical doctrine of creation. In Genesis 1:2, the abyss, chaos (formlessness), is watery, so that we may say here that *aqua prima materia est*. Both *creatio ex nihilo* and emanation ultimately stress that the cosmos has its origin in and from God. Furthermore, in this context, consider the creationist term “from nothing” and the emanationist term “in God.” Both prepositions “from” and “in” must be understood equally as metaphors; neither can be spatially literal. From yet another angle of vision, emanation represents the eternal *consilium* of the divine mind regarding the emergence of the cosmic manifestation; creation represents the concrete manifestation of the cosmos in temporality *sensu stricto*. The *in Deo* of emanation “precedes” the *ex Deo* of creation. The prepositions *in* and *ex* denote respectively the divine immanence and transcendence in relation to the cosmos. Emanation unveils the eternity of the world, whereas creation unveils its temporality; and the two must be related in some mode of qualitative continuity.

Consider also that the doctrines of emanation and creation co-exist in the *Upanishads*, just as they do in Jewish texts. Genesis 1:2 and Wisdom 11:18 teach a chaotic, formless, or void *prima materia*, while 2 Maccabees seems at least to suggest *creatio ex nihilo*, though the language there is possibly ambiguous. Inasmuch as Platonic philosophy stresses that even an eternal cosmos would require an engendering and an Emanator, this model is in accord with the essence of the *creatio ex nihilo* doctrine.

* * *

In utilizing the Platonic concepts of the preexistence of the soul, the dualism of body and soul, the demiurge, the celestial archetypes, and the preexistent formless matter, sacred scripture endorses these perennial Platonic principles of philosophy. The latter must therefore be essentially compatible with biblical doctrine and Christian theology in the areas of ensoulment, anthropology, and the various aspects of creation, namely, demiurge as corresponding to logos; formless matter corresponding to *creatio ex nihilo* (for inasmuch as the nothingness out of which God creates is a primordial, atemporal, non-local reality, this nothingness must be a “positive” reality merely symbolized by the negative denomination of the void); and celestial archetypes corresponding to the divine eternal consilium.

Essay II

Pre-Existence and Re-Existence

There is a mosque whose foundation
Was laid from the first day
On piety.
It is more worthy
Of thy standing forth (for prayer) therein.
In it are men who
Love to be purified; and God
Loveth those who make themselves pure.
Sura 9:108 (Yusuf Ali translation)

The historical sense, the literal interpretation of this Qur'anic passage, is clarified sufficiently in the traditional commentaries. But in this brief meditation we are interested in an anagogical interpretation and sense. According to such a viewpoint, the *aya* refers to the preexistent heavenly mosque composed of the preexistent souls of humanity predestined for purity. This heavenly mosque, its "foundation was laid from the first day," that is, from the foundation of the world, on the first day of creation. It is founded upon piety, or as M. A. S. Abdel Haleem renders this Qur'anic Arabic term, "consciousness of God."⁵⁸ The predestined souls "stand forth" therein—that is, they emerge into existence within the heavenly mosque. They emerge forth therein upon the "first day" of creation. These are the "brothers of the purity," who according to an esoteric Islamic opinion realize that the spirit of God works in all the traditional religions, within peoples of every nation, creed, and throughout all space and time.

A Christian parallel to the idea of the archetypal mosque is found in the earliest ecclesiastical homily preserved (early-to-mid second century CE), known as *2 Clement 14:1-5*. There we read the following of the preexistent heavenly church:

The first Church . . . is spiritual, which was created before the sun and the moon. . . . And the Books and the apostles plainly declare that the Church existeth not now for the first time, but hath been from the beginning; for she was spiritual, as our Jesus also was spiritual, but was manifested in the last days that she might save us. now the Church, being spiritual, was manifested in the flesh of Christ. . . . No man can declare or tell those things which the Lord hath prepared for his elect.

Similarly, in the early second-century CE *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision II, we read: "The Church was created before all things; therefore is she aged; and for her sake the world was framed." The Clementine paradigm, which contrasts the protological and eschatological manifestations of the Church, is reminiscent of those passages found in the *Gospel of Thomas* which in a hinting way treat of the theme of preexistence. It is certainly no coincidence that the first sayings of the *Thomas*

⁵⁸ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

gospel on this theme are introduced by a saying (*logion* 17) also alluded to in the Clement passage quoted above. *Thomas* 17 is also paralleled in an Islamic *hadith qudsi* (a divine narration). Here we give *Thomas* 17-19:

17 Jesus said: I will give you what eye has not seen, what has not been heard, and what hand has not touched, and what has not entered into the human mind.

18 The disciples said to Jesus: Tell us how our end will be. Jesus said: Have you discovered the beginning so that you may enquire about the end? For where the beginning is, from there will the end come forth. Blessed is he who will stand⁵⁹ in the beginning, for he will know the end, and he will not partake of death.

19 Jesus said: Blessed is he who existed from the beginning, before he existed. If you come to exist as my disciples and if you will hear my words, these stones will be your slaves, for to you belong five trees in paradise which stay green in summer and winter, and their leaves do not fall. He who will know them will not taste of death.

Related to this constellation of sayings is *logion* 84 of the same gospel:

Jesus said: You rejoice on those days when you behold your likeness; but when you look upon your images which came into existence before you did, which do not die, and which are not revealed, how much will you be able to bear?

A Jewish parallel to the Islamic and Christian preexistence texts cited above is Psalm 74:2:

Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast possessed of old (*qanita qedem*), which Thou hast redeemed to be the tribe of Thine inheritance; and mount Zion, wherein Thou hast dwelt.

This verse applies to Israel and Mount Zion the language Lady Wisdom uses of herself in Proverbs 8:22:

The LORD possessed me (*qanani*) as the beginning of His way, the first of His works of old (*qedem*).

Consequently, Psalm 74:2 does not chiefly refer to God's redemption of Israel by means of the exodus from Egypt. Instead, the verse hints at the preexistence of Israel. The psalmist in Psalm 119:152 similar applies to himself Lady Wisdom's language of preexistence:

⁵⁹ Compare this with those who "stand" in the celestial mosque of "the first day" (= the beginning) in Qur'an *sura* 9:108. See also the description of the three "inner" apostles James, Peter, and John as "standing ones" in Mark 9:1, Galatians 2:9, etc. as explicated by David Wenham and A. D. A. Moses, "'There Are Some Standing Here. . . .' Did They Become the 'Reputed Pillars' of the Jerusalem Church? Some Reflections on Mark 9:1, Galatians 2:9 and the Transfiguration," *Novum Testamentum* 36/2 (1994): pp. 146-63. Lastly, we refer the reader to Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Niffari's *Kitab al-Mawaqif*, *Book of Standings*.

Of old (*qedem*) have I known from Thy testimonies that Thou hast founded them (*yesadtm*) for ever (*leolam*).

The Psalmist here applies to himself the language Lady Wisdom uses as she speaks in Proverbs 8:23, “I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever (*miqqadme*) the earth was,” and 8:29-30, “when He appointed the foundations (*mosde*) of the earth, / Then I was by Him. . . .”

Among the Abrahamic religions it is indeed surprising that both Judaism and Islam hold to a belief in preexistence of the soul as normative, whereas the Church, which was influenced far more by Platonic philosophy, has traditionally censured the belief. The theological issue may of course be resolved even in the Church, for the matter all depends on the particular sense given to the term “preexistence.” For example, the easiest resolution of the problem, from a classical Christian standpoint, would be to interpret the term “preexistence” in the sense of divine pre-destination, or at least divine foreknowledge, of those souls which would, in time, come to constitute the Ecclesia. The question, ultimately, is one of determining precisely which mode of existence is to be assigned to the term “preexistence.” Consider again *Thomas* 19: “Blessed is he who existed . . . before he existed.” Obviously two different (yet related) modes of existence are involved in this saying, otherwise, depending on how we interpret the *logion*, we would be left with an odd sort of tautology, pleonasm, or a blatantly nonsensical contradiction. The meaning of this paradigm, or one of the possible meanings, is: Blessed is he who was with God in eternity (or, in the eternal mind) before being born in time. Or as John 1:1, 14 reads: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God . . . and the Word was made flesh and tabernacled within us.” Indeed, the words of *Thomas* 19 are applied (in a slightly different wording) by the church fathers (beginning with St. Irenaeus in his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*) to the specific case of the preexistence and incarnation of the *logos*. As Jesus was united, in Christian theology, with the *logos*, but is not simply or simplistically identifiable in his humanity with the *logos*, so that a Christian can say in agreement with Aquinas that Jesus is not the *logos* exhaustively, but is rather united with the *logos*, so each righteous soul analogously exists with God from the beginning, but certainly not in the same mode as that which commences with birth on the earthly plane.

When speaking of preexistence, we are discussing an eternal or atemporal rather than a temporal reality. Here the categories of *tempus* and *locus* do not apply except in a very qualified way. But the necessary limitations of human language are already obvious in the temporal prefix of the very term “pre-existence,” for eternity is not unending time, but rather non-time. Furthermore, just as no eschatological language can be understood in a literal sense, so all protological discourse (concerning, e.g., creation, emanation, preexistence, etc.) must be understood in a symbolic sense. Once we realize that pre-natal/birth and post mortem states can only be discussed in symbolical, analogical, or metaphorical categories, senses, and modes, then we are immediately empowered to resolve most, if not in essence all, of the various theological contradictions relating to the various religions’ theologies of pre- and after-life. Both emergence and departure of the soul “occur” in atemporal modes, and this explains much of the irresolvable problem of identifying precisely in a “scientific” sense when human life begins and ends.

Similarly, we may understand neither resurrection nor reincarnation in a strictly literal sense. If both doctrines symbolically explain the same post mortem state, then at the level of essentiality and intention there is no real contradiction between the two. And this is why transmigration is never explicitly attacked in Abrahamic scriptures, just as the Hindu scriptures never attack the concept of

resurrection. The etymological sense of the very word reincarnation agrees in essence with the doctrine of bodily resurrection, namely, a re-animation of the flesh (“flesh” denoting here the entirety of the person). And if on one level the doctrine of reincarnation presents certain logical difficulties, then certainly so does the classical understanding of resurrection, especially from a Peripatetic viewpoint. For if the “soul” cannot exist apart from the body, then once the body ceases to exist, an entirely new body would have to be created for a resurrection to take place. And this would necessitate the creation of an entirely new soul, given the dynamic and inseparable unity of a human as psycho-somatic entification. The Qur'an, in calling the resurrected body a “new creation,” recognizes that in essence the resurrection of the body involves not a “re-gathering” of the body (“body” denotes in this instance the whole person) in the eschaton, but rather the creation of an entirely new reality. Any other view would seem to entail an implicit belief in resurrection as a mere resuscitation, a return to the mundane mode of existence. Resurrection life is a higher mode, a transfigured state of existence. This is precisely what Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 15 where he states that the natural body is raised a spiritual, that is, “supernatural,” body. The Pauline “dichotomy” of flesh-spirit is not that of *corpus* and *spiritus*, but of the natural and supernatural, or human and divine, modes of existence. An over-literalistic understanding of bodily resurrection would be as absurd as an over-literalistic understanding of reincarnation. Even Plato's statements on preexistence of the soul are to be understood symbolically rather than literally, as well as atemporally rather than temporally. Plato was forced to employ allegories to describe the ultimately indescribable reality under discussion.

In traditional Nordic thought, for one to talk to the dead, the corpse of the desired person had be raised, for according to the ancient Germanic mentality there is no soul without a body. But if there is no earthly soul apart from the body, there is a “divine” element that both preexists and survives bodily existence—namely, the spirit.

When one says “soul,” this often actually refers to the sensible soul. While calling the spirit “divine,” one could clarify, remaining within the pre-established analogical parameters established above, that the spirit can be said to be “preexistent” because it is, according to Meister Eckhart *aliquid increatum et increabile*, in virtue of the eternal (eternal according to Christian dogma) Holy Spirit's immanent presence. The formulation may be highly elliptical, but it is “on the mark” in more than one important respect. To describe the spirit as “divine” would in the Hebrew biblical ambient overlap somewhat with the term “immaterial.” Were one to describe the spirit as “supernatural” (a problematic term in itself), one would have to keep in mind that just as transcendence and immanence can be seen on a line of continuity, so “natural” and “supernatural” must be “linked” at some point. The terms “supernaturally natural” and “naturally supernatural” would express, at least in a limited manner, this continuity.

With regard to the term “soul,” this often actually refers to the sensible soul in ancient philosophical texts. While calling the spirit “divine,” one could clarify, remaining within the pre-established analogical parameters delineated above, that the spirit can be said to be “preexistent” because it is, according to Meister Eckhart *aliquid increatum et increabile*, in virtue of what Christian thought holds to be the eternal Holy Spirit's immanent presence. The formulation may be highly elliptical, but it is “on the mark” in more than one important respect. To describe the spirit as “divine” would in the Hebrew Biblical ambient overlap somewhat with the term “immaterial.” Were one to describe the spirit as “supernatural,” one would have to keep in mind that just as transcendence and immanence can be viewed on a single line of continuity, so “natural” and

“supernatural” must be “linked” at some point. The terms “supernaturally natural” and “naturally supernatural” would express, at least in a limited manner, this continuity.

And here we can avoid much confusion and misunderstanding by recognizing that when many people use the word “soul” they are actually referring not to the “natural” soul, but to the “divine” spirit. By preexistence of the soul, we really mean preexistence of the spirit. And the spirit has both created and uncreated aspects, or modes of manifestation.⁶⁰ Comparatively, however, there is another complication, because in traditional Jewish parlance, the soul (*neshamah/neshamah*) is superior to the spirit (*ruah*), which is the reverse parlance of what we encounter in Christian (and some ancient Jewish) texts. The issue is essentially one of semantics.

In Hinduism, the idea of reincarnation is considered a relative, not an absolute description of reality, as explained by Shankara. From a Vedanta perspective, ultimately only One spirit exists, so that reincarnation cannot involve different or separate spirits (or souls) entering different or separate bodies. Reincarnation therefore explains reality from a merely relative, not an absolute standpoint. This view does not actually deny the existence of separate human identities in the contingent order, but it does recognize that the contingent order is not the absolute. In other words, the created is not the Uncreated, though the two are related in some way, either as creature to Creator, or as emanation to Emanator, and both perspectives, creationist and emanationist, have their representatives in Hindu theology and scriptures.

This line of continuity, or relation, between the unmanifest and manifestation, or manifest beings, is what makes valid the scholastic doctrine of the analogy of Being, which can also be understood as the gradation of being, different modes of being, which implies ontic or ontological differentiation integrated into “simultaneous” continuity. The classic Sufi doctrine of the Oneness or Unity of Being expresses the same idea as the analogy of being. From one view, the relative is as nothingness compared with the absolute; this is the negative formulation. The positive articulation of this relationship is that since the relative and the absolute are in some sense related (as creature to Creator, for instance), then even relative, contingent being/s participate in absolute Being, and therefore cannot be spurned as absolutely unreal in itself/themselves. This continuity between being and Being is related to the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of the soul’s deification. Non-being participates in Being itself, for being mirrors, that is, reflects Being.

In classical theological language, *creatio ex nihilo*. And the bridge between non-being and Being is, in the Abrahamic theologies, the word of command, “Be!” spoken by the divine Word—in Greek, the Logos, in Arabic Kalima or Amr, in Aramaic Memra. The same mediating attribute holds true even if we view the cosmos as emanation “rather than” creation. Ultimately emanation and creation involve matters of semantic emphases rather than essential or total contradictions. Jewish texts support both views. 2 Maccabees 7:28 seems to contain the earliest mention of *creatio ex nihilo* (although this is not entirely unambiguous), whereas Wisdom 11:18 explicitly states—in harmony with Genesis 1:1-2—that God made the cosmos from a preexistent, primordial “formless matter.” But though the formulations diverge somewhat, the underlying intention remains the same. Lastly, the general opinion of scholars is that the Wisdom of Solomon presupposes and teaches the

⁶⁰ The spirit preexists because it is uncreated. But the spirit is also created when viewed from the mode of entification, which is to say when the Intellect is “incarnated” in the human body. In this paradigm, both the preexistent archetype and incarnated sensible form of the Intellect dwells simultaneously and “inseparably” in the human being. Intellect here is used as a synonym of spirit, basing our reflections on Plotinus’ language concerning the pure Intellect.

Platonic doctrine of the soul's preexistence. Since the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches hold the Wisdom of Solomon to be canonical, the doctrine of preexistence could never be absolutely condemned as false in every possible sense in Christianity.

Essay III Image and Likeness

Genesis 1:26-27 teaches that God made humanity in the divine “image” and “likeness.” thus when we encounter in the *Gospel of Thomas* teachings of Jesus concerning “images” and “likenesses,” we are fully within the realm of Biblical, Jewish thought. The influence of Middle Platonic thought need not be automatically assumed. On the other hand, it is known that Platonic philosophy had already been incorporated into Jewish thought in Israel in the pre-Christian era. From a Christian perspective, one could say that the Wisdom of Solomon is a canonical, divine approbation of the perennial Platonic principles of philosophy.

Gospel of Thomas 83 and 84 contain this text’s pronouncements upon image and likeness. These two logia are extremely challenging to translate, given the ambiguity of their Coptic (originally Greek) pronouns:

83 Jesus said this: the images are revealed to the man, yet the light in the images is hidden in the image of the father’s light. he will be revealed, yet his image will be concealed by his light.

84 Jesus said this: you rejoice on those days when you behold your likeness; but when you look upon your images which came into existence before you did, which do not die, and which are not revealed, how much will you be able to bear?

That these two *logia* bear a reference to the Genesis narrative of creation concerning Adam, i.e., humanity, is confirmed by the mention of Adam’s creation in the immediately following *logion*, no. 85: “Jesus said: Adam came into existence from the Great Power and the Great Wealth, but he was not worthy of you, for otherwise he would never have tasted death.”

Logia 83 and 84 contain the notion that every revelation implies a residual concealment. This is to say that every statement uttered by God or humanity involves a certain incompleteness. Dogmas are adequate but not complete expressions of the underlying truths to which they refer and point. In cognitive terms, in every statement there inheres polyvalence, indeed, even what we have called “transvalence.” Every word has its concomitant silence, and vice versa of course. The divine light—light standing here for “revelation”—when entering into the contingent realm by nature of its unfolding into the contingent order, implies a partial (even though adequate) revelation. If, as in *Thomas* 83 and 84, humanity is itself the divine image, i.e., the embodied revelation of the divine, this would imply that humanity is simultaneously the revelation and obscuration of the divine, which is to say that there is no simple identity between the divine and the human. Yet this human limitation itself mirrors the divine reality inasmuch as no revelation of the divine to the contingent order, no self-communication of the divine in the world, can imply plenitude under every aspect.

This mirrors the situation of the absoluteness of the divine Essence, yet the simultaneous relativity involved in any manifestation of that Essence, not to mention any reflection or discourse

about it. *Logion* 84's preexistent images, which are never manifest, must, according to the present hermeneutical paradigm, bear reference to the aspects of revelation which remain uncommunicated, remaining in the divine silence and obscurity. By means of reflection upon mental phantasmata created by the revelation, human intellection must then transcend the limitative phantasmata. Yet in transcending these, one is really only in a certain sense encountering more "simple," "natural" phantasmata. What we are dealing with here is a shift from discursive thought to contemplative intuiting. Intuition, or better, pure intellection, is analogically a quasi-angelic non-discursive mode of thought, and is a perception that is "simple" (unitary, "atemporally" simultaneous) as opposed to "complex" (separative, temporally sequenced).

4. Truth and Person in the Abrahamic Scriptures

To begin with the youngest of the Abrahamic faiths, the following Qur'anic *ayat* illustrate the personal dimension of truth in Islam:

Sura 2:119: Lo! We have sent thee (Muhammad) with the truth.

Sura 3:95: Say: God speaketh truth.

Sura 7:43: Verily the messengers of our lord did bring the truth.

These passages reveal a Qur'anic paradigm, according to which truth is associated with either the divine Person, God, or with the persons of the divine messengers. Qur'anically considered, ultimately God is truth, and so truth is essentially personal in Islam: "that is because God, he is the truth" (*sura 22:6*). By contrast, the Qur'an more than once denominates *islam* in its principal sense, namely, submission to God, as the "religion of truth" (*sura 9:33; 61:9*), insisting that this religion is "above all religion" (*sura 48:28*). This clearly means that true religion in its essence cannot be identified in a limitatively exclusivist sense with any particular religion in the form of a sociological, historical entity, which would apply even to the sociologically manifest religion of Islam. This point agrees with the general spirit and theology of revelation in the Qur'an, namely, that God has revealed a single revelation in varying forms to the world throughout all nations and in all times; *sura 5:48*:

and unto thee have We revealed the scriptures with the truth, confirming whatever scripture was before it, and a watcher over it. so judge between them by that which God hath revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth which hath come unto thee. For each [nation] We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. had God willed he could have made you one community. But that he may try you by that which he hath given you (he hath made you as ye are). so vie with one another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and he will then inform you of that wherein ye differ.

Consider also *sura 22:67*: "and to each nation have we appointed sacred rites and ceremonies." In other words, the truth vouchsafed to Muhammad does not essentially differ from the truth taught by Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, or the rest of the 124,000 world prophets (313 of whom were religion founding messengers) spoken of in Islamic Shi'ite tradition. The concept of truth present in the Qur'an is naturally multifaceted; truth is associated with right doctrine, right beliefs, with reality, in the sense of agreement of thoughts and phenomena with divine or contingent reality. But there is also the identification of truth with God. In this plenary sense, truth is considered as it is in itself, that is, as supraformal truth, complete truth. The plenitude of truth stands in contrast to truths, which are necessarily always incomplete (though not necessarily inadequate), and which therefore can never be identified with the truth as such. The limited, partial nature of truths is indicated in a number of *suras*; 5:84, for instance, speaks of "that which hath

come unto us of the truth,” suggesting that “a part” of the total truth has been communicated to the faithful.

The Qur'an also identifies the truth with the divine Kalima or Amr, corresponding to the Greek Logos, by and in which God creates the cosmos: “he it is who created the heavens and the earth in Truth. in the day when he saith: ‘Be!’ it is. His Word is the Truth” (*sura* 6:73). Similarly, though less explicitly, *sura* 14:19: “hast thou not seen that God hath created the heavens and the earth with truth? if he will, he can remove and bring in some new creation.”⁶¹ Consider also *sura* 15:85: “We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them save with truth.”

The Christian “personal” approach to truth is expressed especially in John 14:16: “Jesus saith to him: ‘I am the Way, and the truth, and the life. no one cometh to the Father, but by me.’” Jesus declares to his generation that God has chosen him as the messenger, and that he is therefore the chosen way to God. In himself, according to Christian theology, is found the plenitude of truth, though insofar as his created humanity is concerned this truth is not to be equated simplistically with Jesus, but rather with the divine reality whom he represents.

Complementing John 14:6’s constellation of “the Way, the truth, and the life” is *sura* 33:4: “But God saith the truth and he sheweth the Way.” In a similar tone, *sura* 34:6 declares: “Those who have been given knowledge see that what is revealed unto thee from the lord is the truth and leadeth unto the Way of the mighty, the Owner of Praise.” The path, the way, is here the path to God, to union with the divine. This is the very same way referred to in *sura* 1: “Guide us unto the straight Way,” in agreement with Jesus’ saying in Matthew 7:14: “how narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life.”

That the truth, life, and way cannot be identified simplistically with Jesus is self-evident, for all manifestation implies form and therefore limitation, and every human manifestation or epiphany of the divine is necessarily contingent in certain aspects. The descent of the divine *logos* as person or as Book necessitates participation in contingency and limitation, in finitude, and therefore in “imperfection.” From a certain Christian viewpoint, Christ “is” the truth under the aspect of his celestial nature, not according to his human nature considered in isolation, which is to say that God as *Ipsum Esse* is alone the supraformal truth, and that, as Jesus insisted, God alone is good, that is, God is the only essential Goodness: “And Jesus said to him, Why callest thou me good? none is good but one, that is God” (Mark 10:18); “And Jesus said to him: Why dost thou call me good? none is good but God alone” (Luke 18:19); “Why asketh thou me concerning good? One is good, God” (Matthew 19:17).

That the truth is manifested and embodied by other sacred persons other than Jesus is demonstrated by post-Tanakh Hebrew scriptures. Sirach 24:24-25, in the Latin Vulgate version has Lady Wisdom declare of herself: “I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue”: *ego mater pulchrae dilectionis et timoris et agnitionis et sanctae spei in me gratia omnis vitae et veritatis in me omnis spes vitae et virtutis.*⁶² The Christian liturgies of the West and East imply that

⁶¹ The latter verse is of course pertinent to the philosophical question of the possibility of many, or “alternate” worlds, or simply the more basic question of ontology and possibility.

⁶² That this verse was apparently absent from the original Hebrew Sirach text does not speak against its doctrinal, let alone, spiritual authenticity and authority. In any event the Hebrew original of Sirach 24 has not been recovered. The Latin “additions” to Sirach 24, if they in fact are interpolations, constitute sacred pronouncements hallowed by tradition and might be spiritually akin

this Lady Wisdom on the earthly plane is the Virgin Mary. Sirach clearly denominates Lady Wisdom, like Jesus in the Gospel of John, as an embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life. The Sirach verses imply that Lady Wisdom is the very plenitude of the divine virtues and that she is the way, the truth, and the life. In ancient Jewish Christianity, that is, the original Jerusalem church headed by James the Just, Jesus' brother, the Holy Spirit was thought of as the celestial mother. Ultimately, Lady Wisdom is but a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, who on the earthly plane manifests herself within Christian belief as the source and guarantor of the virtuous wisdom of Mary.

According to *sura* 16:102, the Holy Spirit sends down the word from God with the truth: “Say: The Holy Spirit hath sent it [the Qur'an] down from thy lord with the truth.” This is reinforced by *sura* 17:105: “With the truth have We sent it down, and with the truth hath it descended.” The truth is sent down by the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth. This brings us to those three sayings in the Gospel of John in which Jesus speaks of the spirit of truth. We have, in the translation below, changed the relevant pronouns to reflect the fact that Jesus, speaking either Aramaic or Hebrew, would have used the feminine pronoun when referring to the spirit, since “spirit” in both these Semitic languages is grammatically, conceptually, and theologically feminine:

John 14:17: the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth her not, nor knoweth her. But you shall know her; because she shall abide with you and shall be in you.

John 15:26: But when the Paraclete cometh, whom i will send you from the Father, the spirit of truth, who pro-ceedeth from the Father, she shall give testimony of me.

John 16:13: But when she, the spirit of truth, is come, she will teach you all truth. For she shall not speak of herself: but what things soever she shall hear, she shall speak. and the things that are to come, she shall show you.

This is the same spirit of truth whose earthly manifestation in the Christian economy of salvation coincides with the Virgin Mary, though of course not in an exclusive or exhaustive sense,

in certain ways to the inspired alterations made by the Greek Septuagint translators to the Hebrew texts of the Jewish scriptures. More precisely, such Latin “additions” might represent a Christian prolongation of ancient Jewish Targumic-like practices designed to amplify and explicate an original text. The origins of these Sirach verses are as it were shrouded in mystery. What may be said with certainty is that the lines in question formed a part of the pre-Vulgate Old Latin version, and thus are ancient, and not merely medieval in origin. Except for the statement, “In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue,” the surrounding verses in question are present in the expanded Greek translation (GII) of Sirach. As for the verse just quoted, the critical Anchor Bible, in its volume on Sirach claims only the following: “At least in its final form this would seem to have been shaped in Latin for alliterative effects”; see Patrick Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (The Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1987), p. 330. This sheer guess, and we are certainly justified in calling it such, is purely subjective, and moreover, ignores the profoundly doctrinal and Sophianic character of the pronouncement. Poetic concerns in prophecy, whether canonical, deutero-canonical, or liturgical, are always of secondary and indirect concern in the domain of the sacred.

for just as Jesus and the Word cannot be simplistically identified, so neither can Mary be identical with the spirit *sensu stricto*. We see from John 16:13 that Jesus was not able to impart the plenitude of truth to the world, but that the spirit of truth shall be able to do precisely that. If there is implied in these verses a certain disassociation between the spirit of truth and the truth itself (for it is said of the spirit of truth that “she shall not speak of herself”), this perspective is adjusted in another Johannine passage, namely, 1 John 5:6. the original Greek can be translated straightforwardly as: “And it is the spirit which testifieth, for the spirit is truth.” Later theologians, sensing a conflict here with John 16:13, “corrected” the text to read: “and it is the spirit which testifieth that Christ is the truth.” According to Christian thought, the revision reflects a theological verity, but certainly so does what is held to be the inspired original wording.

The coexistence of John 16:13 and 1 John 5:6 must mean that the “sub-ordination” of the spirit to Christ is profoundly attenuated and relative. For ultimately in Christian thought both Christ and the spirit constitute the truth. Yet even in the “sub-ordinating” passages in John 14-16, Jesus “sub-ordinates” himself to the spirit, clearly declaring that the spirit will be able to do what he was not able to accomplish, namely, the impartation to humanity of the plenary truth, “all truth.”

Lest it be overlooked, we should point out the similarity between Jesus’ teaching that the spirit would speak not of herself, that she would not glorify herself, but would only speak of Jesus and glorify him, and the traditional Catholic theological dictum that Mary does not glorify herself, but only her son. And yet the son glorifies and praises his mother. Indeed, Lady Wisdom, according to Sirach 24:1-2, “will praise herself, and will glory in the midst of her people. / In the assembly of the Most High she will open her mouth, and in the presence of his host she will glory.” And Mary proclaims in the Magnificat: “All generations shall call me blessed”—this means that praise of the Mary shall exist in every age. Mary and Jesus are in a sense equally blessed, as the Lucan rosary prayer establishes: “Blessed art thou and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.”

Compare Jesus’ words in *sura* 19:31: ““And (God) hath made me blessed wheresoever I may be”; and continuing in *aya* 33: ““And peace be upon me the day whereon I was born, and the day whereon I shall die, and the day whereon I shall be raised to life.’ This was Jesus, the son of Mary, the Word of truth concerning whom they doubt.”⁶³ Jesus says this, note well, with reference to his relation with his mother, as the immediately preceding *aya* 32 reveals: “And (God) hath made me dutiful toward her who bore me, and hath not made me arrogant, unblest.” If “grace and truth” came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17), Mary is the very plenitude of grace, “full of grace” (*gratia plena*), and manifests herself in a certain sense as the spirit of truth on the earthly plane.

That among the senses of John 14-16’s “spirit of truth” is a prophetic reference to Muhammad as Ahmad, the Glorified One, is affirmed by traditional Islamic apologetics. This, however, does not present any contradiction to the interpretation of the Marian manifestation of the spirit of truth. For Mary, according to Islamic mystical theology, is the spiritual mother of all Prophets. Muhammad as Prophet is therefore the spiritual son of the merciful Mary as mother of the Prophets. The Muhammadan and Marian dimensions of John 14-16 are therefore, from an Islamic

⁶³ It generally goes unnoticed that *qawla al-haqqi*, “Word of Truth,” is a Christological title in Qur’an *sura* 19:33. The Word of Truth here is a person whom unbelievers doubt, not an impersonal discourse which unbelievers doubt. The most common dual Islamic Christological title is “The Word and Spirit of God”; God’s Word is the Truth, so that it makes eminent Islamic theological sense to call Jesus the Word of Truth.

viewpoint, complementary, and are not contradictory, inasmuch as these realities interpenetrate each other.

According to the Marian interpretation of John 14-16, Jesus promises that he will return to the world as the spirit,⁶⁴ as the Marian spirit, to bring the plenitude of truth. The spirit descended on Pentecost day according to Luke's Book of Acts. But the same book specifies that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was among those gathered together in prayer on Pentecost. Mary was abiding with the saints, fulfilling John 14:17: "She shall abide with you and shall be in [among] you." The same Johannine verse explains that the spirit of truth will not be seen by the world. It is therefore intriguing and fitting that after Pentecost, Mary is never again mentioned in the Christian sacred scriptures in relation to the earthly sphere. She disappears from the terrestrial scene altogether; for she has become one with the unseen spirit of truth, watching over and teaching, imparting to humanity the plenitude of truth.

All nations were gathered together in Jerusalem on Pentecost day according to Luke. In agreement with this, the Qur'an teaches that Mary became a sign to all creatures, to the entire universe in fact, which naturally encompasses all nations.⁶⁵ Mary disappears from scripture before Pentecost, that is, between Acts 1:14 and Acts 2:1ff. Where did she go? Sura 23:50 suggests to us, in an anagogical sense at least, that she was transferred to Paradise: "And We appointed the son of Mary, and his mother, for a sign and We prepared an abode for them in an elevated part of the earth, being a place of quiet and security, and watered with running springs." From the present perspective, this refers not to the beginning of Jesus' life, to his birth, but to the ending of both his and Mary's presence on earth. They were transferred to a place of peace and flowing streams—reminiscent of the central Qur'anic symbol of Paradise—described in earthly terms to be sure, but Paradise nonetheless.

In the Christian scriptures, after disappearing from the earthly scene in Acts 1:14, Mary next appears—whether directly or indirectly—is beside the point in this context—in Revelation chapter 12:1: "And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun." We have here two intriguing parallels to *sura* 23:50—Mary as a sign, and her dwelling in an exalted spiritual locus. Revelation 12 has been the subject of much debate as well as richly variegated theological speculation. The scenes of the Woman's struggle with the infernal dragon has been interpreted protologically (with reference to the primordial fall of the "angels"), historically (as an account of Mary suffering persecution by Roman authorities, a specifically Islamic tradition), and eschatologically (referring to the final struggle of the saints under antichrist). All three interpretations may be perfectly legitimate and complimentary, even when explicitly referred to Mary under her varying primordial, historical, and apocalyptic dimensions. For example, the preexistent Lady Wisdom of Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24, viewed by Christian readers with proleptic

⁶⁴ See John 14:18-19 and 16:13-22, where Pentecost and eschatological Parousia coincide.

⁶⁵ In Islamic thought, as one of the *ulu al-'azm*, law-bringing Prophets, Jesus, though his mission was historically restricted to his own people of Israel, being the messiah he must have a universal theological significance. Thus he and his mother constitute "a revelation for the worlds and a mercy from Us" (*sura* 19:21) and "a sign" (*sura* 23:50). Given the essential relatedness between a "revelation" (unveiling) and a "sign," the "sign," mentioned in *sura* 23:50, which Jesus and Mary are, must therefore be meant not merely for Israel alone, but like the universal revelation that Jesus and Mary are, the Marian-Christic "sign" must also therefore be "for the worlds," and not for one nation or people only.

reference to Mary, allows us to envision a primordial presence of Mary in Revelation 12's account of the protological fall of the "angels."

Finally, Revelation 12 contains a further parallel to the Qur'anic account of Mary. According to *sura* 19:22-23, Mary cried out in pain and anguish when it came time to deliver Jesus: "And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place. and the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm-tree. She said: Oh, would I had died ere this and had become a thing of naught, forgotten!" Compare Revelation 12:2: "And being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered." The nature of the pain alluded to in *sura* 19 and Revelation 12, however, was not exclusively physical in origination, but was spiritual in nature as well. The very name Maryam (Mary) signifies in Hebrew, "bitterness." For a Christian, Mary bears the name Bitterness, for she and her son through their message turned the bitterness of life into sweetness.

Lastly we point out that in Exodus 15, Moses' sister, the prophetess Miriam (Maryam, Mary), sings a prophetic canticle (verses 20-21), after which Moses leads his people to the waters of Mara (etymologically related to the name Maryam),⁶⁶ signifying the waters of bitterness (verses 22-23). In verse 25, Moses casts a tree into the waters, turning them into sweetness (verse 25). For Christians, this allegorically refers to the immaculate conception, which sweetened and overcame the bitter waters of sin. Recalling *sura* 19's association of the virginal birth of Jesus with the image of a palm tree, we end by observing that Exodus 15 concludes as follows in verse 27: "And the children of israel came into Elim, where there were twelve fountains of water, and seventy palm trees: and they encamped by the waters."

* * *

We now conclude with some reflections on the nature of truth in Judaism, the oldest of the Abrahamic faiths. Genesis 1:1 contains a hidden acronym of *emet* (אמת), "truth," with the *mem* being that of 'Elohim, "God": "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

הָאָרֶץ וְאֵת הַשְׁמִים תֹּאַסְפֵּלְתִּי אֲבָרְבִּירְאָשִׁית

Perhaps there is a hint at this in Psalm 119:160a: "The beginning of Thy word is truth." Psalm 85:12 is also relevant in this context: "Truth springeth out of the earth; and righteousness hath looked down from heaven." This verse is relevant not only because it mentions heaven and earth (as does Genesis 1:1), but because it also mentions "truth" explicitly in the straightforward text and also includes a hidden acronym of *emet*:

גְּשֻׁקָּף מִשְׁמִים וְצָדָק צָמַחַת אָרֶץ מִתְאַ

In Judaism the LORD is the "God of truth" (Psalm 31:6), and this God of truth leads humans by the divine light and truth; Psalm 43:3, "O send out Thy light and Thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy mountain, and to Thy dwelling-places." Truth is personified in Psalm 71:22, although one must read the verse closely to recognize this component: "I also will give thanks unto Thee with the psaltery, even unto Thy truth, O my God; I will sing praises unto

⁶⁶ We of course should not lose sight that the name Miriam was originally an Egyptian name with a different meaning than "bitterness."

Thee with the harp, O Thou Holy One of Israel.” The divine truth is eternal; Psalm 117:2b: “and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever.” In Psalm 119:142b we learn that the truth is the Torah: “and Thy law is truth.” This singular Torah contains multiple commandments, all of which constitute the singular truth; Psalm 119:151: “Thou art nigh, O LORD; and all Thy commandments are truth.” This verse is based on Deuteronomy 30:11 and 14, from a passage that concerns the Torah:

11 For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off.

14 But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

The Psalmist turns Deuteronomy 30’s Torah that is nigh into the Lord who is nigh.

We read in Deuteronomy 32:4: “The Rock, His work is perfect (*tamim*); for all His ways are justice (*mishpat*); a God of faithfulness/truth (*emunah*) and without iniquity, just and right (*tsaddiq we-yashar*) is He.” The language of this Great Song of Moses has shaped Psalm 19:8-11’s praises of Lady Torah:

8 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

9 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

10 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true (*emet*), they are righteous altogether;

11 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. (JPS 1917)

The Great Song of Moses has also shaped Lady Wisdom’s speech in Proverbs 8. Especially pertinent is Proverbs 8:7a, “For my mouth shall utter (*yehgeh*) truth.” This brings to mind Psalm 1:2: “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate (*yehgeh*) day and night.” This leads us back to the insight that the Torah is the truth.

In Psalm 119 we see the Psalmist transforming the demands of Deuteronomy 6:5, “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” It is now not only the Lord but also the Torah who is to be loved with all one’s heart. This love is expressed textually as love of Torah study. One loves the Torah by passionately studying the Torah day and night. Psalm 119 thus constitutes canonical biblical approbation of Rabbinic Judaism and its ethic and practice of passionate Torah study.

Its 176 verses make the Torah hymn Psalm 119 the longest chapter of the Bible (including the Christian scriptures). It should give Christians pause for thought that the longest chapter of the Bible expresses superlative praise of and love for the Torah in each of its 176 verses. While Paul can say something positive about the Torah, he can do this only in a larger anti-Torah context (I refer to Romans 7). This mode of saying something positive about the Torah is not an expression of love for the Torah. In Romans 7 (as in 2 Corinthians 3) Paul argues that the Torah kills. By contrast, Psalm 119 tells us the Torah gives life. This is congruent with Deuteronomy 30:10-16, where God declares to Israel that to keep the Torah is easy, not hard, and that keeping the Torah will bring life; not keeping the Torah will bring death. This cannot be reconciled with Paul’s contradictory

teaching that no one can keep the Torah, that the Torah causes death, and that the Torah has been replaced by the messiah whose death brings life. The cure for such ideas is to turn to Psalm 119 with a pure heart, to fall in love with the Torah.

Jewish tradition understands Genesis 1:1 as “With Wisdom God created the heavens and the earth.” That is, with the Lady Wisdom of Proverbs 8:22, God created. The implication is that Lady Wisdom is the celestial personified Torah. This is congruent with Sirach 24, which identifies Lady Wisdom with the Torah. Ultimately, this primordial Lady Torah becomes the feminine Shekhinah, who is united with the Holy One of Israel, blessed be he. The immense role Lady Torah plays in Rabbinic Judaism rivals that of “Christ” in Christianity. This explains why from the very beginning of Christianity the Torah entered the forefront of the polemics of both Judaism and the Jesus movement as led by Paul. Whichever side one wants to take in this drama, there is no denying that Psalm 119 forms a part of even the Christian Bible. “And Thy law is truth.” Psalm 119:142.

5. Of Suprasensible Archetypes and Sensible Forms Three Metaphysical Investigations

Essay I Esoteric Considerations on the Concept of the “Integral Qur’ān”

To deal with the issue of the holy imams’ doctrine of the integral Qur’ān from an historical perspective lies beyond our intentions in these reflections. As far as the historical dimensions of the question are concerned, we will mention only that according to certain traditions, the holy imams taught that the Qur’ān as received in ecstasy, or in the state of inspiration, by the Prophet “differs” from the Vulgate version of the Qur’ān. The ecstatic, or integral Qur’ān as it is called, was taken by the Mahdi with him into his Great Occultation, and when he is revealed (= *parousia*) at the end of the world, he will bring back with him the integral Qur’ān.

Many misunderstandings can be avoided if we bear in mind that although the Mahdi participates in history by virtue of his parents and his birth, nevertheless, in his essence he is an eschatological entity. Traditions from ibn Babuye al-Saduq accordingly state that the Mahdi’s body is made of light, and his luminosity will be transparent after his *parousia*, or unveiling.⁶⁷ Insofar as the Mahdi’s coming will be an eschatological event associated with the integral Qur’ān’s return, we can state that the Qur’ān possesses an eschatological dimension. But the integral Qur’ān, like the Mahdi himself, presently lies hidden from human view by providential veils. In contrast to the eschatological Qur’ān is the protological Qur’ān, which refers to the archetypal *Umm al-Kitab* (“Mother of the Book”) at the “transitional” level between the historical plane and eternity (“before” creation), which we will call analogically *alpha* (α) eternity. The *Umm al-Kitab* in α eternity is the preexistent celestial Qur’ān, the formless, archetypal, supra-verbal *logos*, which manifests itself on the terrestrial plane as the historical Qur’ān.

Whenever an archetype is manifested on the formal plane, such manifestation by its very nature implies limitation on account of the necessary complexity or diversity implied in every sensible form, in contrast to the “simplex” or unitive nature of the divine archetypes.⁶⁸ The result of this process for Muslim thinking is that the historical Qur’ān is as a divine revelation simultaneously adequate—as adequate as possible on the plane of entification—and bounded by the limitative fields of finitude. That is to say, the Qur’ān is the formless, eternal, uncreated Word of God inliterated in the sensible, created, limited, and thus finite, words of humanity. Given that the Mahdi is expected to usher the world into an eschatological state of being, the Qur’ān he brings is the eschatological transfigured manifestation of the *Umm al-Kitab*. This is to say that he enables

⁶⁷ See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*. Tr. by David Streight (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1994), pp. 116, 222 note 627.

⁶⁸ This dynamic also explains why the human messengers of the divine Light can never in every sense be “plenary” manifestations of God’s attributes; or as Thomas Aquinas informs us with reference to Jesus, the created human nature of Christ cannot exhaustively embrace the uncreated eternal Logos (see *Summa Theologiae* 3 q. 7, a. 3).

humanity to see the *umm al-kitab* transparently through the transfigured sensible forms of the historical Qur'an. We are therefore speaking of what the Sufis have called *kafsh*, inward unveiling.

We will here propose two schemata to assist in illustrating the operative paradigms involved in these reflections. In the first schema, we propose a vocabulary in which the traditional terminology relating to formal sensible and archetypal distinctions is made more fluid in its reciprocal boundaries. This is justified by the fact that the line of continuity between archetype and sensible form can never be completely severed. The central underlying thesis is that sensible forms may be called “sensible archetypes,” given the “substantiating” continuity between the unmanifest and the manifest. The ultimate implication of this paradigm is that archetypes and sensible forms are but two aspects of a single reality, rather than two absolutely separate or distinct entities. Similar to the subject-object dichotomy which is transcended in mystical states of unitive consciousness, the eschatological consciousness transcends and unifies, to a certain degree, the archetype-sensible form “opposition.” Just as a person changes with age, so the archetype is “transformed” by its “passage” through the protological, historical, and eschatological “periods” of cosmic existence. We qualify “periods” because while the protological and eschatological participate in temporality, they are principally atemporal states by virtue of their ontological “nearness” to the α and ω eternity states respectively. That is, they are “nearer” to the supra-temporal than to the historical; by their nature they open out onto the eternal, whereas they are related to temporality principally by virtue of the oppositional force of what in Upanishadic cosmology would be termed the *gravitas* of the *guna tamas*. Naturally, the division of eternity into α and ω states is necessarily somewhat of an artificial segmentation. From the angle of history, it is a useful pedagogical projection; from the eternal “viewpoint” it is chiefly metaphorically applicable.

Schema I **The Atemporal and Temporal States** **And Corresponding Archetypal and Sensorial Vocabulary**

α Eternity	divine supra-sensible archetypes
Protological	“intelligible archetypes” (= intelligible forms)
Historical	“sensible archetypes” (= sensible forms)
Eschatological	“transfigured sensible forms” (= mutually transparent sensible archetypes)
ω Eternity	“return” to α eternity state

In Schema II, the atemporal and temporal states are denoted by the various nouns, whereas the movement of the archetypes and sensible forms through the corresponding states is indicated by the respective arrows:

Schema II

Atemporal and Temporal Procession of the States and Their Archetypes and Sensible Forms



The imams, while recognizing the natural finitude of the formal aspects of the Qur'an, as well as its simultaneously necessary perfection on account of its continuity with the *Umm al-Kitab*, naturally look forward in holy anticipation to the "time" of the eschaton when the supra-sensible archetype of the Qur'an, the *Umm al-Kitab*, will shine transparently through the "historical" Book. The change is of course a transformation, initiated by the Mahdi, in the perceptive powers of humanity; again, this is essentially the sufic *kafsh*. In Hindu parlance, the pure intellect in humanity will be unhindered by the density of the *tamas guna*. The human mind will then be able to pierce effortlessly through the veils of the cosmic phenomena. The imams, realizing that from the absolute point of view no one or no Paul also proposes this view in his Letter to the Romans chapter 9. In chapter 11:33-34, he concludes that the issue of free will and predestination is an insoluble mystery at the level of human reason. But his question in verse 34, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" is answered in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, where he observes that the Spirit is given to humanity for the revelation of the mysteries of God. This is in accord with the Book of Wisdom 9:17: "And who shall know thy thought, except thou give wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above?" In this context, the Spirit corresponds to the pure Intellect, as explicated by Plotinus. The mysteries of free will and predestination must ultimately penetrate and embrace each other dialectically. thing can oppose the Will of God,⁶⁹ naturally teach that the Vulgate Qur'an is the version willed by God as the historical Qur'an; to the essence (*Umm al-Kitab*) through the sensible form (historical Qur'an).

Each of the various states, archetypes, and sensible forms of the above two schemata participate in each other. Thus, though the eschatological state is not to be identified with ω eternity, nevertheless, the former is a proleptic foreshadowing, foretaste of, or opening out towards the latter, given their continuity which ultimately or essentially links them. The eschatological state is also a return to the conditions that prevailed in the primordial Golden Age, when according to tradition, all the sensible forms of creation, including the human body, shone with the divine light. In the historical state, the archetypes and sensible forms are certainly "connected," but the light of the archetype is dimmed by veils when viewed from the sensorial side of manifestation. In the

⁶⁹ Paul also proposes this view in his Letter to the Romans chapter 9. In chapter 11:33-34, he concludes that the issue of free will and predestination is an insoluble mystery at the level of human reason. But his question in verse 34, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" is answered in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, where he observes that the spirit is given to humanity for the revelation of the mysteries of God. This is in accord with Wisdom 9:17: "And who shall know thy thought, except thou give wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above?" In this context, the spirit corresponds to the pure Intellect, as explicated by Plotinus. The mysteries of free will and predestination must ultimately penetrate and embrace each other dialectically.

eschatological state, the veils of darkness will be removed, and the clear light of heaven, of the pure intellect, will shine through the sensible forms unimpeded.

The eschatological state parallels the transfigured state, or station, which the mystic can to some degree attain even now in the historical realm. Metaphysical interpretation of the Qur'an is precisely a "view" into the *Umm al-Kitab* through the "lens" or "gate" of the formal-sensorial, historical Qur'an. Those who are "brought near," are brought near the "coinciding" point of the archetypes and sensible forms. Distance is darkness; nearness opens out onto unending light.

Essay II The Spirituality of the Desert

The rigorous mercy of the harsh divine sun of Wisdom enables the mind to pierce through the entifying *gravitas* of the forms of terrestrial phenomena and appearances. When the pure intellect shines through the reasoning powers of humanity, the immutable divine archetypes are unveiled to our intellectual gaze. We see on earth "as in His high places" (Kaddish). The heavenly archetypes shine through their terrestrial manifestations; which implies that sensible forms are but the manifestations on the sensorial plane of the supra-local and supra-temporal archetypes. The latter are covered with the veils which necessarily accompany and make possible all manifestation.

The unmanifest archetypes are composed of the divine light, which according to *sura an-Nur* is "light upon light"—the unitive light issues forth into multiplicity, thus presenting the enigma of the reality of the One in relation to the many. And "in Thy light do we see light." (Psalm 36:10) To understand by intellection the riddle of the One and the many is to perceive simultaneously the continuity existing between the divine archetypes and their sensorial embodiments known as sensible forms. Intellection perceives that archetypes and sensible forms are linked as subject and object in a way that ultimately results in a *coniunctio oppositorum*, which issues from the transcendence of polarities in the noetic vision resulting from the *unio mystica*. As a human constitutes a triadic unity of *corpus*, *anima*,⁷⁰ and *intellectus* (= *spiritus*), so the unit we will designate as archetype-sensible form is inseparable. The sensible form is the natural "growth" or extension of the archetype emerging forth into the realm of the senses, which is equivalent to saying the realm of matter, i.e., sensorial matter. Intelligible matter and sensible matter are not two separate matters, but a single matter in two modes of "existence," of "standing-forth," and therefore of "emergence." Matter is "manifestation," either in the celestial realm or the mundane realm. The question is the particular modes of manifestation operative in the two realms, which again are ultimately not two separate kingdoms, for the celestial domain, which also may be legitimately termed the divine realm (in distinction naturally from the divine *Ipsum Esse*), also participates in the

⁷⁰ The *anima*, or soul, is the seat of the reasoning powers (*ratio*), whereas the spirit as *intellectus* is the source of pure intellection; "pure" denoting "simplex" or non-discursive. The *intellectus* dimension of the human mind (we may so speak, for the *ratio* is the "gate" of, or to, the *intellectus*) can be indicated by the German word *Geist*, which may be translated as both "mind" and "spirit." Using upper and lower case forms to convey subtle yet vital nuances, we may say that the "mind" indicates *ratio* and that "Mind" denotes *Intellectus*. Naturally, "intellect" may in certain contexts denote *ratio*, and "intellect" the *spiritus/intellectus*. We would also add in this context that the "pneumatic" dimension of the central nervous system, and of neural net activity in general, is in fact the result of the presence of the transnoetic *intellectus*.

contingent order of existence, in its own appropriate way of course.⁷¹ The spiritual and mundane realms, or manifestations of entification, exist along a certain line of continuity by virtue of the bond between the archetypes and sensible forms.

In the sensorial domain, the blinding light of the sun is a most fitting symbol for the unmanifest being of the archetypes, at least from the earthly perspective; and upon the earth, the fullest revelation of the archetypal energies behind sensible forms is revealed by the unrelenting light of the desert sun. The very barrenness and emptiness of the desert mirror the “invisibility” (again, from the sensorial point of view) of the divine realities.

It is in the solitude of the desert, in the kingdom of emptiness, that humanity is most naturally and fully aware of the immensity of the divine presence. All that is false is burned away, and reason opens out onto pure intellection. The limitations of life open out onto potentially unlimited divine infinities; the vicissitudes of the wheel of time open out onto so many unbounded eternities. When the sun sets in the desert, the pure darkness descends, and like the blindness of the brilliant, transfiguring power of the sun, the night’s blackness in its own way reflects the unseen celestial mysteries.⁷² In the deepest night, the rivers of stars speak of the piercing energy of the divine luminosities which human wisdom has perennially spoken of as the eternal archetypes. and in the silence, the fragrance of heaven’s incense hangs suspended in the mystic circle of the kingdom of the night of revelation.

This is the spirituality of the divine desert . . .

Essay III Christian and Islamic Notions on the Celestial Nature of “Christ” With Reference to the *Intellectus* and *Ratio*

One may use the rubric of the celestial and earthly dimensions of “Christ” in order to accentuate Aquinas’ teaching on the distinction between the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of the preexistent Word. The Word can hypostatically unite with, or “theophanically in-presence” persons other than Jesus. Islam recognizes the essence, metaphysically understood, of the two natures, but what is held to be a providentially divergent mode of theological formulation prohibits Islam from

⁷¹ If the celestial order participates in contingency, the divine archetypes, which are “unmanifest” from the earthly angle of vision, must in a certain sense be “manifest” in heaven from the point of view of the non-contingent. According to this paradigm, the celestial realm consists of two orders: the contingent and the non-contingent. The non-contingent is the realm of the pure intellect as divine emanation. Insofar as the divine archetypes reflect and thus participate (for reflection is impossible without some mode or degree of participation) in their own way in the pure intellect, they possess an element of non-contingency. We may also observe that the pure intellect, inasmuch as it “incarnates” as *spiritus* in the human triadic unity, participates, dialectically speaking, in contingency in non-contingent mode. This is to imply that the *Ipsum Esse* and the creation must be “related” in a spiritual bond which gives rise to the enigmatic relation of the One and the Many. If there were no relationship between Creator and created, then the created would “be” utter nothingness, which is as manifestly absurd as it is impossible.

⁷² Psalm 139:12: “But darkness shall not be dark to thee, and night shall be light as the day; the darkness thereof, and the light thereof are alike to thee.”

simply adopting the Church's language, or from understanding it in an unmodified sense. As Nicolas of Cusa in his *De pace fidei* treatise implies, a "northern" viewpoint should not and cannot be reduced to a "southern" viewpoint. The same applies to providentially diverse and divergent theological visions.

Christians, even admirers of Aquinas, are as a general rule unaware of the angelic doctor's teachings concerning the possibility of a multiplicity of hypostatic unions. We can use the term celestial dimension to designate what has been traditionally called the divine nature of Christ in order to accentuate the differentiations demanded by the dynamic process by which the non-contingent divine Word unites with a human person in the contingent order. The interplay of human contingency and divine non-contingency, even if the interplay is effected in a non-contingent mode, is denoted, in this paradigm, by the phrase "celestial nature." The Trinity is not "Father, Jesus, and Mary," but is "Father, son, and spirit." We may speak of the celestial and earthly dimensions of Christ, with all the proper qualifications naturally required by the Thomistic and Islamic theological wisdoms. The terminology of celestial nature seeks to express the subtle yet metaphysically indispensable ontological differentiation implied by the interplay of the contingent and non-contingent natures in mutual "reciprocity" on the contingent plane. Given the widespread simplistic notion that identifies Jesus with the *logos* in an exhaustive sense, especially among evangelical Protestants, an investigation into the topic may help elucidate the matter at hand.

The Sufi doctrine of theophany (*tajalli*) holds that theophanies (*tajalliat*) are manifestations of the divine names, or attributes. God manifests the divine reality by means of the divine names. The manifestation of the divine nature, in view of its interplay with contingency, in this context, with human nature, cannot be considered as the *Ipsum Esse*, or the Beyond-Being. The phrase "divine nature" from this angle of vision is reserved for the Unmanifest divine Essence. Once it interfaces with, or manifests in, the contingent order, it might more appropriately be denominated "celestial" in order to accentuate the associative dimension or aspect of contingency involved. If there is a real "union" (interface) between the two, both must be "modified" in some sense, speaking from the level of "appearances"; that is to say, the reciprocal interaction results in a new phenomenon, a *tajalli*; otherwise the idea of union would have no significance sufficient to justify the existence or use of the term "union." This union is of course not a "con-fusion" but a union in the sense of an "interface."

From the perspective of the doctrine of *tajalli*, the divine names, or attributes, are theophanically manifested. Because of what is held to be a providential emphasis on the attribute of God known as the *logos*, the Christian tends to de-emphasize the divine attributes other than the Word. If the divine Word is united with Jesus, as Aquinas states this cannot be in an exhaustive sense. One could expand this insight by observing that given the infinitude of the divine attributes, therefore the plenitude of the attributes—or even the fullness of a single attribute—cannot exhaustively unite, or interface, with a single human nature. A single human being could never theophanically express all the divine attributes. In Christian thought, Christ is united with the Word, Mary with Wisdom; though of course all attributes, given their essential infinitude, interpenetrate each other's essential divine reality, justifying the Muslim claim that the Prophet of Islam realizes all divine virtues and attributes. The manifestation of the infinitude of the attributes requires an entire cosmos which is infinite *in potentia* in order to theophanically reveal and express the infinitude of the divine attributes. The finitude of the universe, suggested by its temporal creation, opens out onto the infinitude implicate in its supra-temporal "co-eternal" emanation.

“Whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God” (*sura* 2:115). “Everything will perish save his Face” (*sura* 28:88). Face denotes Essence, but the divine Essence can only be indirectly revealed through the attributes, the names of God. the metaphor Face denotes the “outward” aspect of the “inward” divine Essence. If we can apply the metaphor Face to the *Ipsum Esse*, this implies that the divine Essence, on account of an intra-divine reality, “overflows,” in Plotinian terms, “outwards” or “towards” the contingent order, resulting in cosmic manifestation. The principle towards manifestation is implied in the Beyond-Being (Plato’s *epekeina tes ousias*, corresponding to Aquinas’ *Ipsum Esse*), otherwise beings would not be. The essence of Proclus’ doctrine of the henads (the “ones,” the divine “units,” which Proclus equates with the traditional gods) as enjoying the status of Beyond Being which is that of the One itself as First Principle, implies that in order for there to be delimited diversity in the cosmos, multiplicity must be “pre-figured” in some sense in the unitive Beyond Being, the First Principle.⁷³ If there were no such “prefiguration,” if there were no “continuity” between Being (or Beyond-Being) and beings, then, as we have remarked before, beings would not be, which is simply impossible, given the evident fact of cosmic existence. The Beyond-Being “overflows” in order for the cosmic manifestation to emerge onto the plane of entification. This principle is that of immanence “oriented” towards transcendence, and may be represented as a singularity point in or at which “collapse” or co-incide the Latin prepositions *in* and *ex* used in the terms *in Deo* (representing God’s immanence with regard to the cosmic emanation) and *creatio ex nihilo* (representing God’s transcendence with regard to creation). The singularity point embodies a transcendence of the opposites immanence and transcendence. (The same and the different, the *tauton* and the *heteron*, as well as sensible form and archetype, would also collapse in singularity). If immanence and transcendence did not interface at the singularity point, the *ex* of cosmic manifestation would have no being, and the immanence denoted by *in* would never give rise to *ex*. Qur’an *sura* 57:3 proclaims God as simultaneously transcendent and immanent: “He is the First and the last, and the Outward and the inward; and he is Knower of all things.”

It is intriguing to note the orthographic similarity shared between the Greek preposition “in” (*en*) and the Greek number “one” (*hen*), both of which are spelled *epsilon-nu*; the two words are distinguished from each other only by the initial aspirate of *hen*. The question of the One and the many implies the relation-ship between immanence and transcendence. The One as the Within, the inward, the immanent, indicates the divine self-“subsistence.” The One is related to the many in both immanent and transcendent mode. The “in” suggests the divine Essence, which is ever simplex, the multiplicity of attributes and names applying strictly to the divine presence. *Sura* 50:3 denominates God as “the Outward and the inward.” The Outward pertains to the divine names. The titles Inward and Outward must apply, respectively, to the unrevealed and un-revealable divine Essence, and to God as revealed, that is, to the divine presence, or presencing-forth. The distinction between essence and revelation with regard to God leads the perspective of gnosis (intuition) to speak of the “God above God.” Of course, even the “in” and the “One” are but metaphorical or analogical designations of the divine Essence, for the latter is without any attribute or qualification whatsoever, to the point of even the negation of the “way of negation,” the *via negativa*. Since language in itself is a process of “metaphorization,” there is no designation of God that can

⁷³ Proclus is proposing what in essence we also find with reference to Muhammad in Qur’an *sura* 38:5: “How can he claim that all the gods are but one God?” Furthermore, Proclus’ placement of the henads between the first and second principles (the One, the Nous) recalls to us Philo’s doctrine of the “archangelic” nature of the Logos, which is neither created nor uncreated.

ultimately be non-metaphorical, be it termed “God,” “Essence,” “Ipsum Esse,” “Being,” “Beyond-Being,” “Possibility of Being,” “Ground of Being,” “*nirguna-Brahman*,” “the One,” etc. Such language can be adequate in varying degrees of and for approximations, but never as fully circumscribing the ultimately supra-verbal referent which is the divine in itself.

* * *

Schema of the Divine-Cosmic Quaternity

Divine Essence non-contingent; no archetypes; undifferentiated Simplex

Divine Being non-contingent, demiurge; Nous

Celestial realm contingent, non-sensible archetypes

Terrestrial realm contingent, sensible forms

The divine as Essence is “God above God”; the divine as Being is the Creator; this differentiation is paralleled in Philo’s distinction between *ho theos* and *theos*. The continuity which exists between the non-contingent Nous and the contingent celestial realm of the archetypes explains why the *logos* in Philo is at once neither uncreated nor created, “but in between these two extremes” (*Her.* 206). Of course, all four entries in this schema interface with each other in descending or ascending order. The distinctions are therefore principally, though not exclusively, of a pedagogical nature. The archetypes inhere in the Nous; yet from another viewpoint, the Nous is transcendent in relation to the archetypes. The celestial and terrestrial realms are inseparable; if there is a celestial archetype, it must needs be manifested in the terrestrial sphere (and vice versa, since both are an inseparable reality). The “cosmos” embraces both the celestial and terrestrial realms.

Lest it be objected that the celestial realm of archetypes is non-contingent, we will remind the reader of Plotinus *Enneads* ii:4.4, referring to the intelligible realm: “No doubt that realm is, in the strict fact, utterly without parts, but in some sense there is part there too.” Furthermore, as Plotinus also teaches, Nous participates in unity and multiplicity. On account of this “complexity” we denominate the intelligible realm the celestial, not the “divine,” realm. Of course terminology is fluid, and for Plotinus the term *theos* is most applicable to the demiurge rather than to the Beyond-Being, or the One.

For Christian theology, the celestial nature of “Christ” pertains, on account of the union of the *logos* with a created human nature, to the celestial realm of contingency; the question of the status of the *logos* as such is naturally a separate yet related question. From a Plotinian paradigm, the divine, *theos*, as we have remarked, pertains directly to the demiurge, not to the Beyond-Being. The archetypes are the “ideas” of the demiurge, but strictly speaking, there is only a single divine idea, namely, the *logos* as such; when speaking of divine ideas, we must understand the ideas as varying aspects of the unitary divine idea, not as separate ideas per se. Here plurality denotes plurality of aspect and mode, not of essence or substance.

For Plotinus, the divine Essence has no “presence” or realm, otherwise it would be contingent. The divine presence (or more actively expressed, presencing) and the divine Essence must therefore be distinguished from each other. The demiurge is the Nous who contemplates the

cosmos into being by applying images (forms) upon passive nature, by applying sensible form upon intelligible form; “intelligible” implying the thoughts in the demiurge’s mind. The One is neither a Being nor an Essence, strictly speaking, but is the origin (in a qualified sense) of all existence, the possibility of all existence. Nous contemplates the One; this produces the suprasensible forms which are the basis of all existents. The One corresponds to the Platonic Beyond-Being. Discursive thought stands over against *theoria*; the latter is the only *via* to reach full knowledge of the One. The One is the center of the *stanchion*, the framework of existents, and this is produced by Nous through contemplation. The divine “overflow” of the One results in the cosmic emanation. The One’s self-contemplation is Nous; the Upanishadic doctrine of the cosmic manifestation as the result of Brahman’s self-contemplation is a precise parallel. According to *Enneads* V.1.5, the One is beyond number, be it one, three, or any other figure. Nicolas of Cusa made use of this argument in his written dialogues with Islam, thus controversially positing a relativity not only of Islamic monotheism, but also of the Christian concept of the Trinity. Nous is both unity and multiplicity. The Platonic ideas (forms), *eide*, are the thoughts of the Nous. The intellect is Nous, the demiurge is *theos*. Therefore *theos* is not equivalent to Beyond-Being; (this accentuates the difference between *theos* and the celestial realm in our explication above). The One’s overflowing, or outflow, or opening out towards transcendence, is the Nous. The spiritual, noetic cosmos is from Nous; the material cosmos is from the soul (*anima mundi*; world soul).

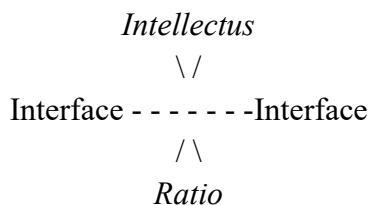
Here we have reached the limit of the Plotinian paradigms which are directly related to our present investigations, though a few final concerns must be addressed. How is it possible for the many to issue forth from the One? What is the relationship between the One and the many? How can multiplicity differ qualitatively from the One from which it emerges? How can the absolute remain “untouched” and “unaffected” by the relative cosmic manifestation which emerges from the One, or conversely, how can creation possess a different nature than the Creator’s divine nature? According to the Neoplatonic authorities, a qualitative onto-logical change, a new level of being, is effected through emanational procession; yet how can one category or level of being give rise to a different category or level of being? John Dillon has offered a suggestive comparison relating to this question by analogically referring to the scientific phenomenon of various quantum particles combining to give rise to qualitatively different particles: “. . . the phenomenon of ‘emergence’, whereby a certain combination of elements, with nothing further added except the peculiar nature of the combination itself, produces a sudden qualitative alteration which results in the generation of a new level of being.”⁷⁴ This process is mirrored in the Neoplatonic concept of procession (emanation) and reversion (*epistrophe*). The analogy is admittedly helpful, but while it offers a helpful parallel from the physical world, the Neoplatonic paradox involved is far from being unraveled, for Dillon offers more of a description than an explanation in this context.

The “image” is the mediating link between essence and sensible form. On account of both the Thomistic doctrine of the Analogy of Being and the Sufi doctrine of the Unity of Being, which is to say that on account of the link between Being and beings, the intellect observes things as they are in themselves (yet not in a plenary sense). The *ratio*, however, observes things only as they appear. But the *intellectus* and *ratio* participate in each other, so that from another angle, the *ratio* can also be said to perceive things in themselves. Yet we must not lose site of the following

⁷⁴ See John Dillon, “Damascius on Procession and Return,” in John J. Cleary (ed.), *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism* (Leuven University Press, 1997), p. 379.

principles: the *intellectus* perceives phenomena from a plenary angle in synthetic mode; by contrast, the *ratio* perceives phenomena from a partial angle in discursive mode.

According to Plotinus, dialectic enables us to synthesize complex knowledge, and by synthesis to arrive at contemplation of the One; thus the goal of dialectic is to arrive at the viewpoint of *intellectus*, not *ratio*. Dialectic is a “reduction” to unity; it distinguishes in its preliminary stages, but ends in synthetic intellection. As Plotinus phrases it, dialectic “clears the ground” through logic in order to attain unitive synthesis. *Ratio* is the inverse reflection of the *intellectus*, which perceives the whole simultaneously and instantaneously; this perception is conveyed to the *ratio*, which must “process” the contemplation in discursive mode. This corresponds, to a degree, with Aquinas’ doctrine on angelic thought and language as instantaneous and simultaneous.



The interface between *intellectus* and *ratio* can illuminate the question of the priority of intellection or rational thought. Ultimately, since *intellectus* is originative matrix and “summative” goal of *ratio*, *intellectus* has priority over *ratio*. From the viewpoint of discursive thought, however, *ratio* has a relative priority over *intellectus*;⁷⁵ “relative” simply because the function and operation of *intellectus* does not directly pertain to complexity and delimited diversity. However, because in view of the interface between it and *ratio*, the *intellectus* issues forth *ratio*, and therefore *intellectus* must itself in a sense possess a dimension of *ratio*; *intellectus* thus retains priority over *ratio*. The question of priority with regard to *intellectus* and *ratio* thus mirrors the relationship between the One and the many. Both must be related; the many must be “prefigured” dialectically in the pure One. *Ratio* must be “prefigured” in *intellectus*, otherwise there would be no *ratio* at all. *Intellectus* “overflows” and thus *ratio* arises. From the perspective of *intellectus*, *ratio* emanates from and resides in *intellectus*. From the perspective of *ratio*, the latter is a *creatio ex nihilo* by the *intellectus*, and the latter is utterly transcendent to *ratio*.

Intellectus and *ratio* are not two separate realities, but two aspects of the single reality of consciousness in itself, which is to say of Being. *Ratio* is *intellectus* in contingent, sensible mode; *intellectus* is suprasensible, and *ratio* is the sensible field of consciousness, or Being.

Any attempted solution to the perennial debate concerning the priority of ratiocination or intellection with regard to the attainment of knowledge of the divine must embrace a certain interplay or integration of both reason and intellect. According to the Qur’anic Light Verse, “God is the light of the heavens and the earth,” and this reality consists of “light upon light.” In the metaphysical illumination, subject and object are transcended, and God is the sole Perceiver, the sole Seer. The children of Wisdom “form their ideas of God from God, of light from light” (Philo,

⁷⁵ From this point of view we can affirm that the pure intellect does not in every respect replace but chiefly confirms the content of *ratio*. Theologically this establishes the need of an interplay between the esoteric and exoteric; metaphysical illumination must accord with the traditional wisdoms.

Praem. 46). “So the things also that are of God no one knoweth but the spirit of God. now we have received . . . the spirit of God. . . . We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:11-12, 16). “And who shall know thy thought, except thou give Wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above” (Wisdom 9:17). The same dynamic is alluded to in Qur'an *sura* 50:16: “We verily created man and We know what his soul whispereth to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.”

Finally, Aquinas in his *Summa contra gentiles* li writes: “Hence, if God's essence is to be seen, the intellect must see it through the divine essence itself, so that in such vision the divine essence shall be at once the object which is seen and that whereby it is seen.” Through reason we deduce God's existence, through illumination his Being; yet even our recognition of God's existence is God seeing God. Our contemplation is God's self-contemplation, which is to say that *ratio* is an emanation (Philo would also say a fragment) of the pure intellect. As a result, we know God through or with God's self-knowledge, or better, God knows God “within” us.

The *intellectus-ratio* interface is analogous to the *aevum* viewed as interface between eternity and temporality. Regarding time, relative time pertains to the field of the partial; simultaneity of all temporal tenses represents what one may call absolute time⁷⁶ (for every relative is relative with reference to an absolute), of time viewed from the field of the whole. Similarly, *intellectus* represents plenary consciousness, absolute awareness, whereas *ratio* pertains to partial consciousness striving towards the whole. When the *intellectus* interfaces with *ratio*, the passage into the latter is experienced by the former as what it truly is, namely, a revelation. For unaided, *ratio* could never access the truths of revelation; yet *ratio* and *intellectus* are inseparable, so that it is artificial indeed to imply that the mind could exist without the divine mind. By virtue of the bond between the mind and intellect, the “natural” *ratio* is a “celestial” phenomenon via its origin in and its bond with Nous.⁷⁷ Indeed, *ratio* is simply the perception of Nous, a perception made possible by the existence of the transnoetic intellect. Finally, the point of interface between the *intellectus* and *ratio* involves a mystery not directly accessible to ordinary, or discursive thought. Like the concept of time dilation, to begin to understand the *intellectus-ratio* interface would require a “counter-intuitive” wisdom which would integrate discursive thought with more “synthetic” dialectical approaches founded upon analogical cognitive-intellective models. There is no “natural” revelation that is not “divine,” and there is no “divine” revelation that is not “natural.”

⁷⁶ What we here call absolute time is not to be confused with strict eternity, but rather a sort of participated, reflected eternity of an analogical nature.

⁷⁷ The following propositions also deserve consideration in this context: The power of *ratio* is to open itself to the revelation of the *intellectus*. The power of discursive thought is to recognize and intuit when to open and surrender itself to synthesis.

6. Immanent *Intellectus* and the Divine Self-Contemplativity

Peripatetic philosophy stresses that there can never be a direct perception by the created mind of the divine reality, or Essence. According to standard theology, the only way this could be achieved on a “creaturely” level would be in an incarnation of God, or in Hindu terminology, in an *avatara*. It is certainly the case in this paradigm that the divine Essence, not being *res* or object, can never be perceived, as “perception” implies and necessitates an “object” that is perceived. the divine Essence is not an object, therefore it cannot be perceived, except by itself in the divine self-contemplativity; only God can know God.

The utterance of Jesus in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one,” invoked by the Church Fathers as an incarnation proof-text, is immediately followed by the qualifying declaration, a citation from the Psalter: “Have I not said that ye are gods?” One of the senses here in which Jesus claims to “be” God therefore also seems to be applied to humans in some general sense.⁷⁸ Colossians 2:9, another traditional proof-text for the incarnation, is similarly immediately followed by the claim in verse 10 that the plenary divine indwelling enjoyed by Jesus is also possessed by believers, through Jesus: “For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead corporeally; and you are filled in him. . . .” The 19th century German Catholic theologian Matthias Scheeben held that the union of the Church and Christ is none other than an extension or prolongation of Christ’s own hypostatic union, and Colossians 2:9-10 provides key support for the orthodoxy (from a Christian perspective at least) of Scheeben’s thesis. As Colossians demonstrates the idea of a single divine fullness shared between Christ and the Church, a similar paradigm appears in the Gospel of John with regard to knowledge of God. John 1:18: “No one hath seen God at any time: the only begotten god who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Only God can know God; yet the son’s unique knowledge of God is imparted to his Church. Such is implied in the phrase, “the son hath declared God,” and is made explicit in John 10:14-15, which, note well, immediately precedes the passage in verses 30ff. concerning the “deity” of Christ, but also, *mutatis mutandis*, that of humanity in general. The determination of correct punctuation is vitally important in this verse, as a careful reading will reveal: “I am the good shepherd; and I know mine, and mine know me as the Father knoweth me, and as I know the Father.” Here there is a qualitative identity between the son’s and the sheep’s knowledge of God, just as we have simultaneously Christ as the son of God and the sheep (i.e., humans) as gods and sons of God in verses 30-36.

Paul tells us that only God can know God, yet he then writes, “But we have the mind of Christ.” Here “mind” functionally accords with the Plotinian cosmic Nous, the Logos, which overlaps with not only the Qur’anic Kalima (“word”), but also more expansively with Kitab (“book”). Al-Hallaj proclaimed: “I am Reality”; that is, “I am God,” and he was martyred for this proclamation. But from an Islamic perspective he was no more unorthodox than was Jesus when he said, “I and the Father are one” in conjunction with the statement “ye are gods.” In ancient Judaism, the antediluvian patriarch Enoch was deified through apotheosis by becoming the supra-angelic Metatron, and as such he was proclaimed “the lesser YHWH” (*3 Enoch*), in contrast to “the Greater

⁷⁸ On the similarities between the John 10 passage and the understanding of “divinity” as “the heritage of all men born on earth,” see W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1966), pp. 270-71.

YHWH.” We are reminded of Jesus who said: “The Father is greater than I.” It is to Jesus in his glorified human nature as the sacred heart that God, according to Catholic thought, has bestowed upon the messiah the divine name above all names (Philippians 2). The Philippians Christological hymn, a further traditional proof-text of Christ’s divinity, therefore in reality treats of the glorified humanity of Christ, and not directly of his “divine” (supra-angelic) nature, though the latter is not unrelated to the reality contemplated here.

According to 2 Corinthians 3:16, a veil is removed upon recognition of Jesus as messiah, and one then beholds the glory of the Lord with open (unveiled) face;⁷⁹ but this glory is the divine presence, not the divine Essence; nevertheless, Paul says that believers are transformed into this very “image”:

2 Corinthians 3:

16 . . . the veil shall be taken away.

17 now the lord is the spirit. and where the spirit of the lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all beholding the glory of the lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the lord.

The glory of the Lord is the divine image, the manifestation or revelation. Paul’s claim is that believers become the image and revelation of God.

Regarding the much-discussed verse 1 Corinthians 2:9, “But, as it is written, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him,’ ”⁸⁰ we can say that God has prepared the vision of himself by himself within

⁷⁹ 2 Corinthians 3:14-16: “But their senses were made dull. . . . The veil is upon their heart. But when they shall be converted to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.” Compare this with Qur’ān *sura* 17:45-46a: “When thou recitest the Qur’ān We place between thee and those who believe not in the life to come, a dark veil; And We put coverings over their hearts lest they should understand it, and in their ears a heaviness.” With both of these passages we may compare Isaiah 6:9-10, cited by Jesus during his ministry: “And he said: Go, and thou shalt say to this people: Hearing, hear, and understand not: and see the vision, and know it not. Blind the heart of this people, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.” That which overcomes blindness of heart is the *unio mystica*, the removal of the veils of cosmic multiplicity issuing forth into the “vision” or realization of the One. This unity is proclaimed in *sura* 17:46b and 57: “And when in the Qur’ān thou namest thy One Lord, they turn their backs in flight. . . . Those whom ye call on, themselves desire union with their Lord, striving which of them shall be nearest to Him. . . .”

⁸⁰ The early Fathers write that in 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul is quoting from the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, a claim considered by modern scholarship as either questionable or as a reference to a no-longer extant text. While translating the Hebrew *Apocalypse of Elijah*, it was with surprise that I discovered that the Hebrew apocalypse contains the saying quoted by Paul. I was pleased to learn that at least one other scholar, Richard J. Bauckham, had also recognized the Elijah saying of 1 Corinthians 2:9 in the Hebrew *Apocalypse of Elijah*. Bauckham cites Buchanan’s translation of the passage from Elijah: “But the eye cannot see the greatness and glory which the holy One blessed be he will provide for his sons.” See Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Brill: Leiden, Boston, Köln, 1998), p. 59. Bauckham notes that the most recent comprehensive study of the extant Elijah materials overlooked this important identification.

the human heart. This vision of the Essence is impossible to attain by the created intellect; but the uncreated intellect, which is precisely the divine self-contemplativity, is bestowed upon humanity by virtue of the divine indwelling within the human heart. The vision of the Essence is seen “in,” but not “by,” the human mind; the vision of God is seen by God and by God alone. It is possible that Paul’s quotation of scripture in 1 Corinthians 2:9 was prompted partly by the tradition behind *logion* 17 of the *Thomas* gospel: “Jesus said: ‘I will give you what eye has not seen, what has not been heard, and what hand has not touched, and what has not entered the human mind.’” Again, that this gift refers to the vision of God is perhaps indicated by the immediately preceding *logion* 16, if the word “father” in this particularly enigmatic saying is indeed a reference to God: “Jesus said: ‘When you look upon him who was not born of woman, bow your face to the ground and worship him, for he is your father.’” Finally, the same saying found in *Thomas* 17 and 1 Corinthians 2:9 is included in the Islamic *hadith qudsi* spoken by God: “I have prepared for my righteous servants that which no eye hath seen and no ear hath heard, nor hath it occurred to the human heart.” We would suggest that the vision of the divine by the divine is here referred to, for the manifestation of God has certainly entered the human mind; but the vision of the Essence could never do so, given the infinite, even if relative, gulf between the divine and the contingent. Certainly the rewards of Paradise could be implied, but the highest reward therein is none other than the beatific vision of God “face to face.”

1 Corinthians 2:11-12, 16

11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him? so the things also that are of God no man knoweth, but the spirit of God.

12 now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit that is of God; that we may know the things that are given to us from God.

16 For who hath known the mind of the lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Verse 16 implies that the faithful have been gifted with the divine mind, the Plotinian Nous. The import of the above verses is twofold. The knowledge referred to here pertains firstly to the “gifts” of God, that is, they signify the category of the divine Presence, or manifestation, which revelation the faithful are by transformation in the Christ. This “transformation” is nothing other than the immanent presence within the cosmos and within the faithful of Nous; and the transformation in the stages referred to in the phrase “from glory to glory” indicates a graduated unfolding or realization of this intellect within the believer. Nevertheless, the “gifts” here must pertain not only to the divine presence, but in some sense also to the Essence itself, for the gift here is precisely God’s own self-knowledge (as is transparent in verses 11 and 12 cited above), the divine self-interiority of

The Hebrew text of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* as established by Moses Buttenwieser in 1897 reflects a recension apparently “corrected” to agree with the Masoretic Text of three biblical passages. I translate the passage as follows from Buttenwieser’s Hebrew text: “And all your sons will be taught of YHWH, and also: Great good will be to them who have love for your Law, and also: How great is your goodness which you have stored up for those who fear you.”

Knowing-Being (Knowing = Being). Therefore, verse 11 indicates that the faithful have been given not only knowledge of the things given to them by God, but that this knowledge includes the impartation of the mystery of the divine self-interiority, or of God's own self-knowing. But it must be insisted that the faithful do not know God, for knowledge implies an object, and God is not such.

Of course, one can make a distinction between God's Essence, which can never be an object of perception, and God as manifest, that is, the God of revelation, who certainly can be, and in sacred scripture, is an "object" of perception and worship. The distinction in this context is that between essence and economy. We would remark here that instead of speaking of the immanent and economic Trinity, as did Karl Rahner,⁸¹ we should rather speak of the immanent and economic deity, for the distinction or qualification of the simple Essence as persons or Trinity can only apply at the level of the divine economy, not at the "level" of the immanent Essence.

Though we are dealing with subtle distinctions, they can be justified, we believe, by Nicolas of Cusa's insight in his *Pace de fidei*, that God in his Essence is beyond all number, be that One or three. We recall also Meister Eckhart's distinction between the Godhead as Essence and God as personal or trinitarian, and his remark that the Godhead is as far above God, to which the trinitarian persons apply, as heaven is above earth ("God and the Godhead differ as much as do heaven and earth"). Naturally, since the immanent God and economic God are not two Gods, but one God under different modes of consideration—if this can be said of the Essence with any sort of qualified justification—one can justifiably relate the economic Trinity back to the immanent deity, in the sense that Hindu theology does not make two Gods out of the Essence (*Nirguna-Brahman*, that is, God without attributes) and the Creator (*Saguna-Brahman*, that is, God with attributes); though in the end one must not lose sight of the distinguishing accentuation between the two terms. In Hinduism, as in the Sufi Ibn al-'Arabi's thought, the divine Essence must remain pure and free of creative activity; this accords eminently with Plotinus. For Ibn al-'Arabi, the Essence is not the Creator, the divinity is. Though his language is different, basically this involves nothing other than the distinction between the immanent and economic deity.

The faithful are said to have the spirit and mind of Christ, which is that of God, and this implies that to the faithful is given God's self-knowing and Being—for knowing is being, in the Plotinian paradigms. Yet the receptors here cannot be the created ego or human mind, but must be the divine element of the Nous immanent within the human mind. According to Christian notions, in Christ, this Nous "replaces" the created ego, as Paul proclaimed: "And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). Even more pointedly, Jesus declares in *logion* 108 of the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas*: "Whoever drinks from my mouth, he will be even as I am, and I will become he; and what is hidden will be made manifest to him."

The so-called drunken Sufis respond to this type of mystery in an Islamic context with expressions such as: "I am Reality"; "Glory be to me"; "There is nothing but God." Jesus responds to the same mystery by saying: "I and the Father are one" and "ye are gods." St. John of the Cross, like the Sufis, responds by teaching: "We are God by participation," and clarifies that the Lover and Beloved are one, and that to see them as two is the result of a veil of an illusory separativity between, or constituting the duality of "I and thou." In this sense, it was not the Prophet as Beloved who was conveyed to heaven by the divine Lover on the night of his Mi'raj. When the veil of

⁸¹ See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*. Translated by Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

separation is removed, Sufis see the truth of the Qur'anic *aya* on the Mi'raj, which informs us that the Prophet saw the signs of God in heaven; yet the *aya* ends by proclaiming that only God is the seer, the hearer: "Glory be to him Who carried his servant by night from the holy mosque to the Farthest mosque, of which We have blessed the precincts that We may show unto him of Our signs; Verily he, he is the all-hearing, the all-seeing" (*Sura Bani-Israel* 1). But again we note: the Prophet saw the signs of God, not the divine Essence. Yet if this distinction is important, so it is also vital to recognize that by virtue of the *unio mystica* the Lover and Beloved, the I and thou, are one, not two, and this precisely on account of God's self-knowing in the creature. The Prophet saw the signs of God; God saw and "was" the divine Essence "in" the Prophet. Similarly, in the Hebrew text of Genesis, when Hagar has a vision in the desert, she calls the sacred space where the vision took place *Beer-lahai-roi*, which in Hebrew is a profoundly ambiguous formulation, for it is not clear in this phrase whether God saw Hagar or Hagar saw God. This ambiguity relates to the fact that at one exegetical level God saw God "in" Hagar; that is, the ego of Hagar was not involved in the *visio Dei*; only the self can know the self. Though it is on the one hand legitimate to speak of the divine self-knowing as the subject of knowledge, on the other hand we must qualify the word "subject," for it implies an object, and God transcends the subject-object dichotomy, and neither element of the pair can apply to the divine in the strict sense.⁸²

What we are left with to consider is a dynamic which involves a continuity between God's Essence and God's revelation(s), the latter constituting signs pointing to the divine referent as such. The created mind is complex, the Uncreated mind is simplex. Yet Meister Eckhart tells us that the human mind is "uncreated and uncreatable." This is the Pure Nous of Plotinus' doctrine, imparted, as Paul informs, to believers. Therefore the Peripatetic paradigm stands justified: the divine Essence as non-*res* cannot be known, for it is not an object of knowledge. Yet the divine intellect is imparted to the creature, it dwells immanently within humanity, the divine intellect which is the divine self-interiority of Knowing-Being. And this trajectory is also known to Aquinas, as he writes in his *Summa contra gentiles* li: "Hence, if God's essence is to be seen, the intellect must see it through the divine essence itself, so that in such vision the divine essence shall be at once the object which is seen and that whereby it is seen." We know God through God's own self-knowing. But the latter perspective Aquinas inherited not from Aristotle, but from Plato, through the channels of the Christian synthesis of Paul, Plotinus, Proclus, and Pseudo-Dionysius.

This leads to a final observation that is often unrecognized by many "traditional" Thomists. Aquinas, though he is rightly known as the great Christian assimilator of Aristotle, by the very fact of his specifically Christian identity, represents a synthesis of Aristotle with the Neoplatonic heritage of the Christian tradition, which had adopted the systems of Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus via the works of Augustine in the West and Pseudo-Dionysius in the East. The Thomist system is essentially a synthesis of Aristotle and Plato, with the Neoplatonic paradigms predominating. With all necessary qualifications freely admitted, we may confidently assert that Aquinas was, viewed

⁸² By the phrase "God in the strict sense" we refer to "God" as the unmanifest divine Essence, or Eckhart's "Godhead" in contrast to the "economic" God, or God as revealed by God. The economic God can legitimately be spoken of as an "object" of perception, devotion, theological discourse, etc., whereas this can never be the case with regard to the divine Essence, at least not in Itself as such.

from a Christian context, the last great Neoplatonic philosopher.⁸³ To denominate him as a strictly or preeminently Peripatetic philosopher or theologian would be correctly to acknowledge his assimilation of Aristotle, but this would also overlook his own religious self-identity and the Neoplatonic-Christian matrix to and into which he assimilated the Stagirite.

Humanity can know that the divine Essence is, but not what it is,⁸⁴ for the Essence is not “attainable” through knowledge in a cognitive mode, but only through “knowledge” in the mode of union between the Lover and Beloved, in which union the distinction between the two is transcended, so that only God knows God. Humans cannot know God, but God can know God “within” humans by God’s own self-knowing. But dialectically expressed, this divine self-knowing becomes humanity’s truest identity. and this divine self-identity of the faithful is itself, according to Matthias Scheeben’s paradigm, the result of the prolongation of Christ’s own hypostatic union, for the mystical union of the Church with Christ flows from Christ’s own hypostatic union with the *logos*. Thus one can appreciate Meister Eckhart’s claim that at the heights of spiritual realization one passes from the vision of God’s Being (= revelation) to the “vision” of the divine Beyond-Being (Essence)⁸⁵ —for at this stage, the visionary’s limited ego is extinguished in the divine, equivalent to the extinction known in Sufism as *fana*, so that God knows God “within” the believer.

As far as the limited ego is concerned, it can only know that the Essence is, not “what” it is, given the incommensurable distance between the Creator and creature. Yet given the “continuity” between the absolute and the relative—if there were no relationship between beings and Being (*Ipsum Esse*), then beings would not be at all, which is impossible—the cosmic Nous is immanent within the created intellect. If such were not the case, we could not even with special revelation comprehend that God is, leaving aside all questions of what the divine Essence is in itself. The Peripatetic axiom that God in his Essence is unknowable is fully justified, as is the equally valid Sufi axiom that in *fana* God knows God “within” the believer. The two positions coexist in dialectical tension between the divine and the human self-identities/identity.

We will, in conclusion, briefly comment upon this same dialectical tension present in Aquinas’ words cited previously. If “the intellect sees it,” that is, the “divine Essence itself,” then the “intellect” in this case must be the divine intellect immanent within the created intellect, for the created intellect can never see the divine Essence except in a dialectical sense in which the divine self-knowing becomes the truest self-identity of the creature. Lastly, Aquinas’ proposition that “in that vision the divine essence is both the object and the medium of vision,” calls forth the following

⁸³ We might call Aquinas a theologian-philosopher. In any case, Plotinus and Proclus (and before them the Jewish exegete Philo of Alexandria) can also equally be called both theologians and philosophers. They may be called theologians, for their philosophy was inseparable from a traditional school of wisdom that integrated sacred theurgy, a school which constituted a spiritual, religious path as devotional and earnest in the search for the Divine as encountered in any of the Great Religions.

⁸⁴ On the divine self-knowledge, see Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence according to Shankara, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2006).

⁸⁵ Meister Eckhart’s terminology differs from Aquinas’, but can be reconciled with it. Western theologians tend to designate the divine Essence as “Being,” hence Aquinas’ *Ipsum Esse*. In the East, following Plato, theologians tend to designate the divine Essence as *Beyond-Being*. In any case, it is transparent that Aquinas means by *Ipsum Esse* the same reality as denoted by the Eastern term *Beyond-Being*. For Eckhart, the term *Being* refers to the God of revelation, whereas *Beyond-Being* designates the divine Essence, the unrevealed and unrevealable God.

observations. Strictly speaking, the divine Essence cannot be the “object” of any contingent vision—only the God of revelation can be such; therefore we must understand Aquinas’ language here as reflecting the dialectical tension between the transcendent divine self-contemplativity and the same divine self-knowing immanent within the created person or contingent knowing subject as its truest identity. This last phrase, “knowing subject,” must also be understood in a dialectical sense, given the qualifications necessitated by the problematic polarity of subject-object in the larger framework involved here.

7. The Neoplatonic and Thomistic Synthesis of *Esse* and *Ens* Abrahamic and Hindu Contours

Aquinas and the Neoplatonic philosophers share a common achievement, namely, a synthesis of Plato and Aristotle on the central question of Being. This major endeavor of Aquinas allows us to characterize him to a certain degree as the last great Neoplatonic philosopher in the history of Christian thought. We by no means seek to deny the real areas of conflict between the angelic doctor and the divine Plato, especially with regard to certain (though naturally not all) issues of epistemology, for to be sure, on various topics Aquinas stands on the side of Aristotle; on the other hand, this is often done not “over against” Plato, but represents an assimilation or recognition of Aristotle in a Platonizing mode (indeed, a similar paradigm obtains with regard to Aristotle’s own “assimilation” of Plato).⁸⁶

Given this aspect of Aquinas, we may justly hold that although the outward edifice of Thomas is largely comprised of Aristotle’s categories, syllogistic structures, and other general formulae, nevertheless, to a significant and often unacknowledged degree, the soul that animates the Thomistic corpus is predominantly that of the Platonic trajectory (again, the same could be said in a modified sense of Aristotle himself, freely admitting all necessary qualifications). In the final analysis, the concordance between Aquinas and the Neoplatonists on the central question of Being, as explicated by Plato and Aristotle, justifies categorizing Aquinas as a Neoplatonic philosopher in the particular domain under consideration. At the very least one may confidently conclude that the Neoplatonic influences in Aquinas are far more extensive and pervasive than often recognized or emphasized by exegetes. In Aquinas the influence of Plato often chiefly derives indirectly via the great Neoplatonists Plotinus and Proclus, the latter principally through the medium of St. Dionysius, whom Aquinas quotes on more than 1,700 occasions.

For Plato, Being (*ousia*) is derivative of the One, and this One, which is the Good, is thus necessarily “beyond Being” (*epekeina tes ousias*). For Aristotle, rather than the One (which is the Good) having the primacy, Being (*ousia*) represents the reality above which there is none “higher.” To risk oversimplification, we can say that Aristotle accordingly concludes that God is the highest being (*ousia*), the highest concrete individual substance (*substantia*) or entity (*ens*). Aristotle’s view of God as the highest *ens* accords in certain ways with the usual monotheistic conceptions, as reflected, for instance, in the Arabic phrase, *Allahu akbar*, understood properly in the superlative sense, “God is greatest,” rather than in the strictly grammatical comparative sense, “God is greater.”⁸⁷ *Allahu akbar* implies that God is “the greatest God,” a phrase that repeatedly occurs in the ancient Jewish text 3 Maccabees, and which reflects the Jewish orientation and scriptural usage in general.

Aristotle’s superlative ontological view also roughly accords, admittedly not in every respect, with the Hindu Sanskrit designation *Paramatma*, that is, the “supreme self,” as it is usually

⁸⁶ On possible syntheses of Plato and Aristotle, see Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); George E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle From Antiochus to Porphyry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁸⁷ After all, it is implied in the phrase “God is greater” that God is always greater, thus justifying the superlative rendering.

rendered in English. This latter terminology at the purely lexical level corresponds to conceptions such as “the supreme Being,” or “the highest Being.” But according to the Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Thomistic paradigms, God (the divine Essence) is neither the supreme Being nor the highest Being; God is rather Being itself, *Ipsum Esse*, which in turn corresponds more or less to Beyond-Being. To speak of God as the supreme or highest self, at the strictly lexical level, to a certain degree corresponds to Aristotle’s concept of God as the highest *ens*, or entity. But the divine Essence as such is not the supreme or highest self, but “selfhood” itself.

The view that God is the highest entity is modified in the Platonic tradition as a whole, which reasons as follows: God is not *res*, God is not an entity beside or among other entities; God is not even, strictly speaking, the supreme or highest entity, nor is God the supreme or highest being, but rather Being itself. “God” in this latter usage agrees with *Nirguna-Brahman*, God without attributes, the Unmanifest divine Essence. In the term *Paramatma*, the sanskrit prefix *para-* (cognate with Greek παρά) means literally *beyond*, hence, *other*, *farthest*, and as a consequence, “supreme self” as a translation of Paramatma is justified. Yet inherent in *beyond* and *other* is the idea of transcendence; therefore, if *para* has “quantitative” properties, it also possesses “qualitative” dimensions. That is, the “supreme” opens out semantically onto the plane of transcendence, so that *Paramatma* can connote indirectly (and esoterically)⁸⁸ “Other than self,” “Beyond self,” “Supra-self,” “Not self”; and these titles accord with the term Beyond-Being. The same opening towards transcendence implied in this context by *para* may also be applicable to Aristotle’s concept of divinity as the “highest” Being, so that “highest” is not to be understood in a limitative sense, either connotatively or denotatively.

The polyvalent, even transvalent quality of the term *Paramatma* can be illuminated with reference to the *Bhagavadgita* 15:17:

But yet another is the supreme Being called
the supreme self [*Paramatma*], who as the inexhaustable lord,
Pervades the three worlds and sustains them.

As Radhakrishnan notes on this verse, *Paramatama* here denotes not *Nirguna-Brahman*, but *Saguna-Brahman*.⁸⁹ This interpretation is clearly correct, for the verse states that *Paramatma* as here envisaged enters into the realm of cosmic manifestation (“the three worlds”), and this cannot be said, *sensu stricto*, of the Unmanifest divine Essence. Additionally, and even more clearly, as the *Bhagavadgita* continues in 15:18, it is revealed that in this particular Hindu scripture *Paramatma* is specifically the Avatar Krishna: “And since I transcend the destructible, and since I am higher also than the indestructible, therefore am I celebrated in the world and in the Vedas as the supreme Person.” The synonymous relationship (not strict identity) between verse 17’s term “supreme self” and verse 18’s term “supreme person” establishes an unmistakable parallelism in this regard. This

⁸⁸ One could of course reformulate this conclusion and argue validly that although the prefix *para-* implies certain limitative semantic qualities at the lexical level, nevertheless from a strictly theoretical perspective, in the term *Paramatma*, *para-* is to be understood “non-literally,” and therefore *Paramatma* could apply directly to the reality of the unmanifest divine Essence, that is, to *Nirguna-Brahman*. In both perspectives one is dealing with varying nuances of a single truth rather than with exclusive or “excluding” alternatives.

⁸⁹ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita* (New Dehli: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 332.

contention is in any case confirmed throughout the *Gita*; for instance, in 10:12, Krishna the Avatara is addressed as *Parambrahma*: “You are the supreme Brahman, the supreme sanctifier, the holiest of the holy, the Eternal Being, the divine Person, the first god, the unborn, the all-pervading.” The attributes of Sanctifier, Person, and Cosmic Pervader apply more strictly speaking to Being rather than to Beyond-Being. Thus in this verse *Parambrahma* denotes the manifest God, not the Unmanifest divine Essence. This is understandable, given that the verse refers to the Avatara Krishna, and consequently not to the divine as Unmanifest, for the descent of an Avatara is a divine manifestation and revelation by definition.

Bhagavadgita Book 11 concerns the theophany of the Universal Form of God to Arjuna. This divine form, in that it is a sensible, describable form, and in that it is revealed, or manifested, must therefore pertain to Being rather than to Beyond-Being, which latter is strictly Unmanifest, and cannot be manifested as such in the order of contingency. And let us not overlook the fact that the supreme Lord whose form is revealed to Arjuna in Book 11 is the form of the Avatara Krishna, under his celestial aspect to be sure. In *Bhagavadgita* 11:37 Arjuna addresses the Avatara Krishna:

. . . O exalted one who are greater than Brahma, and primal creator! O infinite Being, lord of gods! O you pervading the universe! you are the indestructible, that which is, that which is not, and what is beyond them. You are the primal god, the ancient being, you are the highest support of this universe. You are that which has knowledge, that which is the object of knowledge, you are the highest goal. By you is this universe pervaded, O you of infinite forms!

Given that the Avatara Krishna is spoken of here in terms denoting the Unmanifest divine Essence, that is, “that which is, that which is not, and what is beyond them,” plainly meaning “you are being and non-being and what transcends being and non-being,” we see that the Avatara can speak in the name of the absolute Unmanifest, on account of the celestial nature “incarnate” on the earthly plane. *Bhagavadgita* 11:37 clearly “unifies” both Being and Beyond-Being (the latter is the equivalent of “non-being”), and this is consonant with the fact that Nirguna-Brahman and Ishvarah, the latter being the personal cosmic Lord, are not two separate Gods. Accordingly, Arjuna rightly assimilates the Personal God to the supra-Personal (trans-personal) divine Essence. This paradigm constitutes additional support for the suggestion that the semantic field of the term *Paramatma* encompasses polyvalent (and transvalent) applicability to both Being and Beyond-Being. Again, in *Bhagavadgita* 9:19, the Avatara Krishna proclaims: “I am that which is and that which is not,” that is, “I am being and beyond being.”

The “continuity” between *Nirguna-Brahman* and *Ishvarah* in the *Bhagavadgita* is understandable given that this entire sacred text is a dialog between the Avatara Krishna and the hero Arjuna. Because the *Upanishads* are not spoken by an Avatara, it is comprehensible that these metaphysical treatises, especially the *Mandukya Upanishad*, more sharply differentiate between *Nirguna-Brahman* and *Ishvarah* (corresponding to *Saguna-Brahman*) than is the case in the *Bhagavadgita*. Both perspectives are sacred, and the differences which obtain in these contexts can be traced to the fact that the *Bhagavadgita* is an “avataric” revelation, an “incarnational” proclamation, whereas the *Upanishads* are treatises of a more “systematic” metaphysical nature.

In the *Bhagavadgita*, at least at the lexical level, as we have explained “supreme self” denotes Being (*Ishvarah*), whereas “Beyond Self” denotes Beyond-Being, *Saguna-Brahman* and *Nirguna-Brahman* respectively.

Allahu akbar corresponds precisely to this dual application of the term *Paramatma*, so that in its metaphysical sense the first part of the dual phrase *Allahu akbar* means “Beyond-Being,” that is, the Unmanifest divine Essence. Therefore, the denotative and the connotative semantic fields of *Allahu akbar* correspond to the theological and the metaphysical domains respectively. To be even more precise, *Allahu* corresponds to Beyond-Being, whereas *akbar* corresponds to Being and cosmic manifestation, for *akbar*, “greatest,” implies Greatness itself, and greatness implies immensity, that is, the tendency immanent within Beyond-Being to issue forth, through the Plotinian “overflow” which is Being, into cosmic multiplicity and expansiveness. Therefore, just as the Shahadah contains a summary of metaphysics in the form of two testifications or confessions of faith, the first testimony implying the Unmanifest, the second testimony implying cosmic manifestation, so the phrase *Allahu akbar* reflects these same two metaphysical realities in its two words.

In Judaism, the proposition that YHWH is the greatest God among all gods refers to the reality of the Creator God as highest *ens*; the verses that by contrast denominate the “other gods” as “false gods,” that is, as not existing at all, and that specify that the LORD alone is, these verses refer to the reality of the Unmanifest divine Essence.

Now just as the denotative and connotative understandings of *Paramatma* can be synthesized—for as we have previously remarked, the divine Essence and the Creator are not two separate Gods—so the Neoplatonic philosophers and Aquinas intuited that Plato’s Beyond-Being and Aristotle’s God as highest *ens* (entity) could be reconciled. For Aquinas, this reconciliation is in certain respects articulated in the proposition: “in God, Existence and Essence are the same”; this is the title of *Summa contra gentiles* I:22, from which we here quote:

If then the divine essence is something else than its own existence, it follows that essence and existence in God stand to one another as potentiality and actuality. But it has been shown that in God there is nothing of potentiality, but that he is pure actuality. Therefore God’s essence is not anything else but his existence.

That “in God existence and essence are the same” follows from the truth that “God is his own essence” (*Summa contra gentiles* I:21). For Aquinas, the synthesis of Platonic divine Beyond-Being and Aristotelian divine superlative “existence” or Being is encapsulated in the term *Ipsum Esse*, according to which God is Being itself. When Aquinas specifies that God is pure actuality, this applies to the divine Essence, and therefore presents no contradiction to the reality of the divine hypostases, which though *sensu stricto* are pure actuality, nevertheless represent a sort of divine “potentiality,” viewed from without. Viewed from within, however, the hypostases occur in “eternal” mode, outside of temporality (cf. Sirach 24 where Lady Wisdom says, “the Lord created me from eternity, before the beginning”). Moreover, literal potentiality in God would reduce the Creator to the ontological status of the creature, which would be intrinsic heresy.

When the Sufis say that in *fana* (mystical extinction of the illusory ego) God knows God by God in the heart of the faithful, the preposition “in” must be understood as metaphorical with reference to the Unmanifest divine Essence. Greco-Roman philosophy in general establishes that

the categories of *tempus* and *locus* cannot apply to God, for God cannot be confined within the boundaries of what is manifestly contingent and limited. Prepositions and other parts of speech which signify temporality and locality cannot apply to God in the literal sense, if by God we understand the divine Essence. (This brings us back to the limitative aspects of the Sanskrit prefix *para*). As a consequence, when the Qur'an proclaims that "God is the First and the last" (pertaining to *tempus*) and "the Outward and the inward" (pertaining to *locus*), these divine names function as metaphorical attributes of the divine Essence. Yet with reference to the Creator, the God of revelation (the revealed God), these names are properly analogical.

Scholastic theology specifies two types of analogy, namely, proper analogy and improper analogy, the latter being the metaphor. Analogy and metaphor can be compared fruitfully with the relationship obtaining between intrinsic symbol and extrinsic sign. The former participates in the reality which it reflects, whereas the latter constitutes merely an outward signification of a particular reality. A symbol is such by its very nature; a sign is such by some convention. Temporal and spatial attributes can therefore function as metaphors of the divine Essence and as analogies of the God of revelation.

Place and time can be further applied to God analogically, for through Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine of the First relativity (= Maya) *in divinis*, a continuity is established between the divine Essence and the creation (and this "continuity" is none other than the Creator God). If God were not the highest *ens*, there would be, in Islamic terms, no likeness or similarity (*tashbih*) to God in the cosmos. Yet through the reality of *Ipsum Esse*, that is, of *epekein tes ousias*, dissimilarity (*tanzih*) is maintained between God and cosmic manifestation. Admittedly, the doctrine of relativity *in divinis*, as historically formulated, does not explicitly resolve all the obvious tensions between the opposition of the absolute and the relative. Certainly no Hindu thinker would confuse the pair so as to identify the absolute with the relative, or vice versa.

The Sufi doctrine of the Unity of Being accentuates the truth that in a certain sense "nothing but God is." Yet the relative existence that beings possess must subsist in a line of continuity with Being (divine Being), otherwise, as we have more than once specified, beings would not be at all. And it is precisely at this point that the Sufi doctrine of the Unity of Being overlaps with the scholastic doctrine of the Analogy of Being, or the analogical predication of Being. According to this paradigm, on account of the creature's source and origin in the Creator, who ultimately is *Ipsum Esse*, the being of contingent beings can be understood with reference to Being itself (though identity of the two is by no means posited). Finally, analogical predication implies that the creature's relationship with and closeness to God is ineffably intimate. As Aquinas writes in *Summa theologiae* iIa q. 8 a. 1 co.: "But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing, as was shown above (7, 1). hence it must be that God is in all things, and most intimately." (*Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest, cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt, ut ex supra dictis patet. Unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime*).

In Qur'anic terms: "We verily created man and We know what his soul whispereth to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein" (*sura 50:16*). Analogical predication arguably can connote the possibility that the First Relativity occurs *in divinis*, for this possibility is opened up by certain implications of Aquinas' synthesis of *esse* and *ens*, of being and existence (or entification). Therefore, it is possible that the doctrine of divine relativity can be integrated, admittedly *in obliquo*, within the Thomistic framework.

In conclusion, we must offer a necessary qualification of the phrase “occurs *in divinis*.” None of these three words can be understood literally or concretely. First, there can be no action in relation to God, for action implies *tempus* (succession of events), and this cancels out the verb “occurs.” Second and equally, there can be no *locus* with relation to God, and this cancels out the preposition “in.” Third and finally, since according to the apophatic approach God can as to Essence only be described through the *via negativa*, even the word *divinis* must be canceled out. Naturally one could conceivably accentuate the dimension of *tashbih* in these contexts, but not in a sense that would literally or categorically contradict the dimension of *tanzih*.

8. Some Notes on the Spirit and Word in Abrahamic Texts

Sura al-Qadr refers to “the fullness of the *amr*,” that is, of the Word, the Arabic term *amr* being cognate with Aramaic *memra*, the precise conceptual equivalent of the Greek word *logos*. But in Arabic, this *amr*, the Word, carries the accentuation, or the particular “verbal” semantic implication, of “command.” Now the principal Word (*kalima*) is precisely an imperative word of command, namely, the divine creative ‘Be!’ associated with the phrase “and God said,” repeated ten times in the Genesis creation account. The word for “said” in Genesis 1 is the Hebrew verb *amar*, “to say,” which is a word of command or decree. In *sura Bani Israil* 85-86 we read: “The *ruh* pertains to the *amr* (Word) of my Lord.” The spirit pertains to the Word, the creative command of cosmic manifestation. Note that the *ruh* and *amr* also appear together in *sura al-Qadr*, as quoted at the opening of the present paragraph. There the *ruh* brings to the world the *amr* in all its fullness, which in Greek would correspond to the pleromatic *logos*. The angels are mentioned along with the *ruh* in *sura al-Qadr* because they are precisely emanations of the *ruh*.

In *sura 40:15*, the word *amr* appears with a valence that overlaps with that of the personified Greek *logos*: “The Exalter of ranks, the Lord of the throne. he casteth the spirit of his Word [*amr*] upon whom he will of his slaves, that he may warn of the day of meeting.” and similarly we read in *sura 42:52-53*:

And thus have We inspired in thee a spirit of Our Word [*amr*]. Thou knewest not what the scripture was, nor what the Faith. But We have made it a light whereby We guide whom We will of our bondmen. and lo! thou verily dost guide unto a right path. the path of God, unto Whom belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. do not all things reach God at last?

The Isma’ili mystic Abu Ya’qub Ishaq ibn Ahmad as-Sijistani, who was martyred in 331 AH, identifies the *amr* of God with the Word (*kalima*) of God. Sami N. Makarem encapsulates as-Sijistani’s doctrine of *amr* as *kalima* as follows: “Abu Ya’qub ishaq as-Sijistani in his epistle *Tuhfat al-mustajibin* says that divine Will (*al-amr*) was the first and only thing to issue out of God. it is also called . . . Word (*al-kalima*). . . . this *Amr* . . . is the source of creation.”⁹⁰

In this context we should mention the famous Johannine Comma, an interpolation to the First Epistle of John: “And there are three who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. and these three are one.” This comma, as it is called, which is not a part of the

⁹⁰ Sami N. Makarem, “The Philosophical Significance of the Imam in Isma’ilism,” *Studia Islamica* 27 (1967), p. 42. The same essay explains that according to the Isma’ils, the Imam is the Word of God. Makarem gives the following *hadith* of Imam ‘Ali: “I am the Will [*amr*] of God, ‘He makes the spirit (*ruh*) from His will [*amr*] descend upon any of His servants to whom He pleases to send it’ (Sura XL 15).” Makarem’s translation should be emended somewhat. *Amr* is primarily Word, secondarily Will, so that ‘Ali is explicitly identifying himself as the Word of God: “I am the Word of God, ‘He makes the Spirit of His Word descend upon any of His servants to whom He pleases to send It.’”

canonical text, could from a traditional viewpoint nevertheless be considered “sacred” on account of its influence on liturgical formulations.

According to Islamic Peripatetic philosophy, the sacred Father is the tenth intelligence, which coincides with what in Greek could be called the *logos* as such, albeit in refracted mode; the Father is also called the holy spirit in the same speculative philosophy. Thus the Father, Word, and spirit all refer to the *logos* of God; precisely as the medieval Johannine Comma declares: “And these three are one”; or in Qur’anic terminology: “the spirit pertains to the Word.”

The tenth intelligence, the active intelligence, known as the Father of Forms, is the tenth emanational intelligence; but the ten emanational intelligences are not in essence separate “entities,” for there is only One intelligence, the Pure intellect, again in accord with the Greek valence of *logos*. That the tenth intelligence is not a separate intelligence from the First intellect—emanation chiefly implies not separate identity, but a “separate” function, aspect, mode, or dimension—is indicated by the fact that it is in Islamic philosophy denominated as the spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit.

To review a few of our philological observations, the Aramaic term *memra*, Word, which is cognate with Arabic *amr*, appears in the Jewish Aramaic Targumim, roughly overlapping temporally with the emergence of the Qur’an. *Memra* is a divine hypostasis and reverential “evasive” synonym for YHWH and *ha-Shem* (“the name,” i.e., the Lord, God). *Sura al-Qadr aya 4* declares concerning the “night of majesty” (*qadr* here denotes “majesty,” “glory,” “honor”; only in a secondary sense does it connote “power” or “destiny”): “Therein descend the angels and the spirit, with leave of their lord, with the fullness (*kul*) of the *amr*.”

Rudi Paret suggests that in the *sura al-Qadr* phrase *min kulli amrin*, *min* is partitive in sense.⁹¹ However, Claus Schedl rightly objects, because this would make the angels, the spirit and the *amr* not only semantically equivalent but identical, when in fact in *sūra al-Qadr* the angels and the spirit bring the Word (*amr*), so that “they are not themselves the Word.” Schedl therefore concludes that *amr* rather than *min* being partitive has as a consequence that *kulli* is not to be understood adjectivally in this case but as a noun, as “fullness,” equivalent to Hebrew *kol* and Greek *pleroma*.⁹² *Min kulli amrin* is consequently to be translated as “with the fullness of the Word.”⁹³ Therefore, by divine decree, the angels and the spirit descend “in” the “night of majesty” with “the *pleroma* of the *logos*,” to express the statement using corresponding Greek terms. According to Shi’ite gnosis, the “night” in *sura al-Qadr* is the lady of light, Fatima, who is the *Umm al-Kitab*, Mother of the Book.

When at this point we review the above philological observations and view them synoptically, we obtain the following surprising picture: In the night of glory, the angels and the spirit descend with the fullness of the Word. This brings to mind Luke’s gospel story wherein on

⁹¹ Rudi Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980).

⁹² In the Kabbalah, the Hebrew term *ba-kol*, “in everything,” denotes the personified feminine Shekhinah’s immanent presence in the world; see Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), p. 171. Moreover, “the Shekhinah is called *kalah ha-kelulah min ha-kol*, ‘the bride incorporated from everything’” (*ibid.*, p. 172). The Hebrew *kalal* is cognate with the Hebrew words for “crown,” “bride,” and “all” (*ibid.*).

⁹³ See Claus Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus. Die christologisch relevanten Texte des Korans neu übersetzt und erklärt*, pp. 114-115.

the night of the nativity of Christ the Word, “an angel of the Lord” (most likely Gabriel, who is assimilated to the spirit in Islamic theology) was accompanied by a host of angels who sang: “Glory [= *qadr* in Arabic] to God in the highest . . .” (Luke 2:9, 13-14). Thus *sura al-Qadr* operates on two levels simultaneously. First, the subject is the descent of the Qur'an in the night of Glory. The night is essentially the *Umm al-Kitab*, and as Fatima is an earthly manifestation of this Mother of the Book (Book, theologically encompassing the *logos*), so in Christian thought Mary is an earthly manifestation of the celestial Mother of the Book, who gave birth to the *logos* on the night the angels sang “Glory.” The second sense of *sura al-Qadr* is therefore that in the night of Glory, the night of the nativity of Christ the *logos*, the spirit (the angel of the Lord) and the angels descend; they descend in the night, that is, they descend in Mary, with the *pleroma* of the *logos*.

The lexical level of valence of Arabic *amr* as “command” could by extension be understood as “Word of Command,” in order to express the primary and secondary levels of meaning. The reason that *amr* in Qur'anic Arabic possesses the nuance of “command” is that, as we have pointed out, in the Qur'an the “principal” Word (*kalima*) is precisely a command, the Word of Command, “Be!” (*kun*). This is the creative Word, and its use in the Qur'an corresponds to the Genesis text's *Fiat lux!*—“Let there be light,” or simply, “Light, be!” This refers not to the light of the sun, but to the preexistent primordial light, that is, to the luminous *logos*, or in Islamic terms, to the *Nur Muhammadi*. The primordial light of Genesis is interpreted as the messiah in Jewish Midrash and Kabbalah. In John 1:4 and 2 Corinthians 4:6 the primordial light of Genesis' creation account is interpreted as the *logos* and as Christ respectively.

To return to the subject of the *Umm al-Kitab*, we cite *sura 43:1-3*:

1. By the *kitab* that makes clear,
2. We have made it a Qur'an in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand.
3. And verily, it is in the *umm al-kitab*, with Us, Transcendent, Wise.”

In *ayat 1-2*, the elements “make clear” and “understand” allude to the fact that the *kitab* corresponds conceptually to the Greek *logos* (“Word,” “reason,” “mind,” cf. “logic”). According to *aya 3*, “it,” the *kitab*, “is in the *umm al-kitab*,” just as the spirit in *sura al-Qadr* brings the *kitab* “in” the virginal night, who is the *umm al-kitab* on the earthly plane. It is perfectly “logical” that the *kitab* dwells “in” its own mother. In *aya 3*, God specifies that the *umm al-kitab* is “with Us.” The *umm al-kitab* corresponds to the personified entity known as Lady Wisdom in the Jewish scriptures. Qur'an *sura 43:3* describes the *umm al-kitab* as “Transcendent, Wise.” She is transcendent, for she is celestial, and since “Wise” is a typical and frequent Qur'anic name of God, to say that the Mother of the Book is Wise denotes that she is the very plenitude of divine Wisdom, and consequently she is Wisdom as such. In agreement with *aya 3*, specifying that the *umm al-kitab* is “with God” (“with Us”), Lady Wisdom states in Proverbs 8:30: “I was with him forming all things. . . .” *Aya 3* can be alternatively rendered as “We possess the *umm al-kitab*.” With this, compare Lady Wisdom's utterance in Proverbs 8:22: “The lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways. . . .” According to the Aramaic *Targumim*, in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” the word “beginning” denotes Lady Wisdom, and the Aramaic text therefore reads: “In/with Wisdom, God created the heavens and the earth,” that is, in Lady Wisdom, who was “with him forming all things” (Proverbs 8:30).

The *umm al-kitab*, who corresponds to Lady Wisdom, is “with Us” (with God); this recalls John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. . . .” By analogy we would maintain that just as in Christian theology the “dwelling” or “being” of the Word with God denotes a hypostatic relationship, so in Qur’ān 43:3, the statement that the *umm al-kitab*, Transcendent and Wise (implying Wisdom as such), is “with God” similarly denotes a “personed” relationship with God. The divine aspect of this Wisdom is indicated by its “transcendent” nature.

We may reformulate the message of *sura* 43:3 as follows: The mother of the Word is with God. And in the Beginning (in Wisdom, or in the *umm al-kitab*) was the Word, and the Word (who proceeds from Wisdom) was with God. . . . The following phrase denotes the personified nature of this “dwelling” with God: And the Word (which proceeds from Wisdom) was God. In fact, a metaphysical approach could find an equivalent teaching in *sura* 6:73-74: “He it is who created the heavens and the earth in Truth. In that day, when he saith, Be! it is. His Word is the Truth. . . . Knower of the invisible and the visible, he is the Wise, the Aware.” Here it is explicitly stated that God creates by means of the Word (cf. the Greek *logos*), for his truth through which he creates is specified to be his Word.

The statement that a divine personified entity, namely, Wisdom (the *umm al-kitab*) is “with” God, that is, dwells with God, already suggests a metaphysical truth which at the exoteric level of Islamic *kalam* might be censured as *shirk*, that is, “association with God.” This censure, to be sure, can in a sense be supported by an apparently literal reading of certain Qur’ānic *ayat* in which it is explained that no one was with God to help him in creating the heavens and the earth. But the Jewish scriptures, as thoroughly monotheistic as the Qur’ān, teach that Lady Wisdom was “with” God during the creation, assisting the divine artificer. Lady Wisdom speaks in Proverbs 8:27: “When he prepared the heavens, I was present”; verse 30: “I was with him forming all things.” According to Sirach 24:6, Wisdom proclaims that she was the means by which the primordial light (recall the luminous *logos* of John 1:1ff.) of Genesis was made: “I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth.” The light (the luminous *logos*) derives from Wisdom, which once again gives us the figure of the *umm al-kitab*. and metaphysically, despite the reservations of *kalam*, *sura* 43:3 corresponds in essence to the claim of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8:27, 30 that she was “with” God during creation. Therefore the Jewish *Targumim* of Genesis 1:1 declare: “In/with Wisdom, God created the heavens and the earth,” that is, in/with Lady Wisdom. This is alluded to esoterically in the Qur’ān where it is repeatedly stressed that God created by means of his Word, freely admitting all valid divergences between the Christian and Islamic contents and understandings of revelation. The resolution of the problem of *shirk* in this context is that the divine attribute of Wisdom, like all the divine attributes, is not other than God, as the classical Islamic creeds specify. The tendency of some authorities, especially among Shi’ites, to categorize God’s Speech or Word as an act of creation rather than a divine attribute has at least two motivations.⁹⁴ First is a polemic concern to combat the Christian doctrine of the *logos* as uncreated in an unqualified sense. Second is the theological assertion that the uncreated Word of God, the eternal Qur’ān, is clothed on the earthly plane in the created and temporal words of Arabic.

According to Proverbs 8:24, Lady Wisdom was “conceived” by God. Sirach 24:5 calls Wisdom “the firstborn before all creatures.” Wisdom 7:25 describes her as “a certain pure

⁹⁴ For instance, see the discussion of divine attributes in Haji Mirza Mehdi Pooya, *Fundamentals of Islam* (Karachi, Pakistan: Pakistan Herald Press, 1972), pp. 10-12.

emanation of the glory of the almighty God.” The fact that these same passages state that Lady Wisdom was “created” (in an “eternal” modality) indicates that she is a personified divine entity, and thus is not to be identified with God as such, strictly speaking. This created aspect does not, however, contradict the fact that the divine attributes are not other than God, for the attributes apply on the relational level to the realm of cosmic manifestation, that is, to creation. Sirach 24:14: “From the beginning, and before the world, was I created. . . .” How was Lady Wisdom created? Sirach 24:5: “I came out of the mouth of the Most High, the firstborn before all creatures.” The divine mouth implies the divine breath (the spirit) which precedes the enunciation of a word. Lady Wisdom is the divine breath, that is, the Holy Spirit. Yet “mouth” implies secondarily Word; thus the Qur'an specifies that in relation to the created status of Jesus Christ, “When God ordains a matter, he says to it only, Be! and it is” (*sura* 40:68). “Lo! the likeness of Jesus with God is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then he said unto him: Be! and he is” (*sura* 3:59).

When we examine the Jewish scriptures pertaining to Lady Wisdom, it becomes apparent that in Hebrew the concepts of “generation” (in “eternal” mode) and “creation” of Lady Wisdom are used essentially with equivalent meanings. And one should recall that the original sense of the term “son of God” in the Bible functions as a metaphor for “enthronement.” When the Israelite king was ceremoniously enthroned and crowned, he was metaphorically proclaimed “son of God,” and was said to have been “begotten by God.” Psalm 110:3 is addressed on the historical plane to the king of Israel: “With thee is the principality in the day of thy strength. . . . From the womb before the daystar I begot thee.” Similarly, another messianic (that is, “anointed” for “kingship”) Psalm reads: “The Lord hath said to me: Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee” (Psalm 2:7). And Jesus’ status as “son of God” in the New Testament, in its original sense, agrees basically with the language of the Jewish Tanakh. Consider Romans 1:4: “Who was designated the son of God in power . . . by the resurrection. . . .” Acts 13:33 applies the fulfillment of Psalm 2:7 to the resurrection of Jesus, when he became the “son” of God: “. . . raising up Jesus, as it is written . . . : thou art my son, this day have i begotten thee.”

The original Jewish and Christian concept of “son of God” is thus metaphorical and perfectly monotheistic. Yet this language could not have been integrated in an orthodox sense by the polytheistic Arabians of Muhammad’s time, so deeply ingrained in them was the notion of the quasi-physical nature of God having male and female offspring. “God neither begets nor is he begotten” (*sura* 112:3). In the sense referred to here in the Qur'an, no right-minded Jew or Christian has ever believed that God begets. “Beget” as applied to God in Jewish and Christian theology is a strict metaphor, and often even its metaphysical import has been assimilated into Islamic and Christian philosophy, namely, in the doctrine of the divine eternal emanations, a doctrine also fully present in the Jewish text of the holy *Zohar*. The *Zohar* and Christian philosophy preserve the metaphorical language regarding God “begetting” emanations. Some might suspect that such language is providentially censured in Islam. Islamic philosophers certainly speak approvingly of emanations, but not as having been “begotten” by God. Thus, whereas the Bible speaks of God begetting the Word, the Qur'an uses the equivalent language of God “speaking” the Word. For Judaism, too, God “begets” by speaking. Thus Lady Wisdom was begotten through proceeding from the mouth of God (Sirach 24:5).

There is a certain degree of concordance between the Christian concept of the eternal generation of the Word and various Islamic doctrines on the eternity and divinity of the divine attributes, with the important distinction that in Islamic *kalam* the attributes are not in the strict

sense personal/personified or hypostatic. Yet an esoteric opening to a personified understanding of the divine attributes is contained in various modes and degrees in Islamic speculative philosophy on the divine emanations. Especially to be noted in this context are the similarities which obtain between the Christian understanding of the eternal *logos* and the Sufi concept of the *Nur Muhammadi*. On the Shi'ite side we should mention the doctrine of the “eternal” imam, coinciding with the Sufi idea of the Perfect Man. We will note in this latter context that it is esoterically implied that the Prophet and other members of the *Ahlul Bayt* are assimilated to the “divine” plane as divine personified entities by the teaching which maintains that the five names of the members of the Prophet’s household are inscribed, from “pre-eternity,” upon the divine throne.

In the end Islam and the Church must remain separate because of what some might call providence. By no means can all theological tension between the two faiths be resolved. Nevertheless, at the esoteric level, the different religious mysticisms can overlap to some degree at least that is impossible in any case on a theological plane.

PART II

NEW TESTAMENT THEMES

COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Overview of Part II

Part II concentrates on Christian doctrine, including parallel Islamic traditions centering on concerning Jesus ('Isa) and Mary (Maryam). The essay "The Christic and Marian Dimensions of the Good Friday Singularity Paradigm" attempts to reconstruct the earliest temporal and supra-temporal understanding of aspects of the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, the descent of the spirit on Pentecost, and the second coming of Christ in the New Testament. At the earliest stage of Christian belief, all these tropes represented spatio-temporal unfoldings of what was thought of as a single timeless event. Viewed in this way, some of the chronological anomalies in the gospels may be explained as the result of secondary level "historicizations" motivated by liturgical considerations. If one gets behind these secondary elaborations, various theological tensions within Christian theology may be resolved to a certain extent, as well as tensions that exist between Christian and Islamic sources that treat of these doctrines.

The chapter "On the Possibility of the Multiplicity of *Logos* Incarnations" is an in-depth presentation and assessment of Aquinas' teachings on the multiplicity of *logos* manifestations and of the possibility of incarnation of the Holy Spirit. These issues relate broadly to the Qur'anic doctrine of the diversity of revelation and more closely to Islamic understandings of Muhammad as Paraclete and Mary understood in relation the celestial spirit. The chapter explores works by Aquinas including the *Summa* and beyond wherein the angelic doctor affirms the possibility of multiple *logos* incarnations. In regard to this essay, as well as others, I gratefully acknowledge the insights and comments of Dr. Michael Ewbank, though the conclusions drawn are naturally my own.

Throughout Part II, I remind the reader of how some aspects of Christian and Islamic notions of Mary are based ultimately on the Jewish scriptural trope of Lady Wisdom (Proverbs 8, and later Sirach 24 and Baruch 3-4). Although Christianity and Islam take the idea of Lady Wisdom in directions that Judaism cannot accept, the Christian and Islamic sources cannot be understood without reference to the Jewish ideas that have in part informed and shaped them.

9. The Christic and Marian Dimensions of the Good Friday Singularity Paradigm

It is well known among biblical scholars and theologians that the Gospel of John chapter 20:22, in portraying Jesus as giving the spirit to his apostles on “resurrection Sunday” compresses the resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost into a single sacred event. The Johannine utterance, “He breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Spirit,” receives the following note in the Catholic New American Bible: “This is the author’s version of Pentecost.” Actually it is not that John “compresses” events that were originally distinct. On the contrary, it is the synoptic gospels which take an essentially multifaceted yet unitary event and segment and project it out onto several “historical” layers. Even John 20 itself, in contrast to the main body of the same gospel, reflects this process of segmentation in that it “spatially” and temporally separates Good Friday from the resurrection-ascension by the imposition of a three-day period. Throughout John, at least until the second section of the passion narrative, the crucifixion is inseparable from the glorification, or ascension, of Jesus. John 12:32: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself.” John considers the lifting up on the cross as the ascent to God, which effects the *apocatastasis*, which is expressed in the Qur'an as the universal return called *al-Ruj'ah*. The Johannine passion narrative, at least until chapter 19:30, in contrast to the remainder of the text, agrees with the overall trajectory of the gospel and “compresses” together the crucifixion and “Pentecost.”

John 19:30’s statement regarding Jesus on the cross, “And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit,” is curiously phrased. Theologians largely agree that this at the very least is intended in a double sense which includes an allusion to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which Luke temporally “localizes” on Pentecost. But this historicizing element that delays the outpouring of the spirit until Pentecost is utterly unknown and alien to John. John 19:30 presents Good Friday and the outpouring of the spirit as the same event. John says nothing of a pneumatic significance relating to Pentecost, this lying outside his theological field of vision and concern. In having Jesus hand over the Holy Spirit, a direct reference to Jesus’ death is avoided in the Johannine passion verse under consideration. The cross was essentially not the death of Jesus, but his return to God, his ascension. thus, in agreement with the Qur'an, Jesus experiences a “deathless” transition to God: “. . . they slew him not for certain. . . . But God took him up unto himself” (*sura 4:157-58*). His lifting up on the cross is thought of as his ascent to God. In “handing over the spirit,” what the synoptic gospels see as Jesus’ death with reference to his personal “spirit,” John portrays as the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (the “equivalent” of Luke’s Pentecost Holy Spirit story), which originally is a Good Friday event. This is the culminating point of the Johannine paradigm of Jesus’ crucifixion as his ascension to God.

That the spirit was poured out on Good Friday, that the cross was not in an absolute sense Jesus’ death but his ascent to God, was the original kerygma of the Jewish Christians, as recorded in the *Gospel of the Hebrews*: “After they had raised him up on the cross, the Father took him up into heaven unto himself” (M. R. James translation). The *Gospel of Peter* informs us: “And the lord cried out aloud saying: ‘My power, my power, thou hast forsaken me.’ And when he had so said, he was taken up.” The text of the *Acts of John* gives the title of “resurrection” to the cross itself. The *Odes of Solomon* 22 apparently portrays Jesus’ triumph on the cross as occurring at one and the same time in Sheol and in heaven. This must mean that the cross and resurrection are viewed, from

a transcendent perspective, as one and the same triumphal event. Lest one disregard “apocryphal” sources, we note that the equivalence of cross and ascension is supported by more than one New Testament verse, both implicitly and explicitly. The Letter to the Hebrews 10:12 states of Jesus, that “when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, he sat down on the right hand of God.” Colossians 2:15 places the triumph of Jesus at the cross, not three days later. The historicizations separating Good Friday and the resurrection by three days, and the resurrection and the outpouring of the spirit by forty days, were originally not intended to be taken literally in a strictly or limiting historical sense, but were formulated by employing transparently symbolic numbers based on well-known Hebrew scriptural antecedents. The motivation would have included liturgical-calendrical concerns.

In the Gospel of John there is also a “compression” of “Pentecost” and the eschatological *parousia* of Jesus (see chapters 14 and 16), so that we may also join, *sub specie aeternitatis*, Good Friday with the *parousia*. Good Friday was in a sense, specifically from the viewpoint of realized eschatology, the end of the world. This explains why Matthew 27:53 in its original text, places the resurrection of the dead—an undeniably eschatological event—at the foot of the cross. This is congruent with Jesus’ words in John 5:25: “Amen, amen I say unto you, that the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the son of God, and they that hear shall live.” That this refers to the eschatological general resurrection of the righteous as well as unrighteous is demonstrated by verse 29: “And they that have done good things, shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.” Therefore, Good Friday with its resurrection of the dead, viewed from the present accentuation, ushers in the eschaton. In agreement with the atmosphere of apocalyptic upheavals and transformations associated with Good Friday in Matthew 27, a Jewish-Christian gospel (the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*) records, in M. R. James’ translation: “‘Father forgive them’: at this word of the lord many thousands of Jews that stood round about the Cross believed.” Here the event of the thousands of souls who were baptized on Pentecost according to Acts 2:41 (“three thousand”) is retrojected back to Good Friday.

Having noted that the gospel authors subsequently divided, for the sake of sacred symbolism, the single (but multifaceted) reality of Good Friday into several separate events,⁹⁵ we are left with the enigma of the early Christian traditions which assimilated the transfiguration upon Mount Tabor to the ascension of Jesus. The ending of the *Apocalypse of Peter* portrays the transfiguration of Jesus as his glorification through ascension into heaven. Similarly in 2 Peter 1:16-18, where we would expect a reference to the resurrection (or “post”-resurrection appearances of Jesus), we find instead a narration of the transfiguration as the central defining miraculous event witnessed by the apostles and offered by them to the world as evidence of the Christian faith’s authenticity. Though only implicitly so, it is nevertheless clearly apparent that 2 Peter, in agreement with the *Apocalypse of Peter*, views the transfiguration as the resurrection-ascension, so that this theological idea possesses not merely apocryphal (or esoteric) witnesses, but is also of canonical status. But if, as we noted earlier, the transfiguration is ultimately inseparable from Good Friday’s multifaceted “singularity” (we use the term as employed in physics, in an analogous sense of

⁹⁵ This is to say that the “events” are separate in only a symbolic sense. The “events” are actually various aspects of a single event, or sacred reality, which constitutes an atemporal singularity participating in history.

course; singularity may be represented by the mathematical integral symbol ∫), which finally embraces even Jesus' eschatological *parousia*, then the transfiguration ultimately implies the *parousia* itself.

This claim receives confirmation from the synoptic accounts of the transfiguration. Mark's narration of this occurrence (9:1-9) is introduced at chapter 8:38-39. Verse 38 refers to the *parousia* when "the son of man . . . shall come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Verse 39 then gives us Jesus' solemn assurance: "Amen I say to you, that there are some of them that stand here, who shall not taste death, till they see the kingdom of God coming in power." Mark's account is paralleled in Matthew 16:27-17:9, and Luke 9:26-36. That the transfiguration is the fulfillment of this *parousia* promise is an inescapable conclusion, and this was recognized as early as Origen, and before him already by 2 Peter 1:16 which describes the transfiguration as "the power and *parousia* of our lord Jesus Christ." The inseparability of the transfiguration from the resurrection-ascension of Jesus is also borne out by the divine declaration of Jesus' sonship in the transfiguration accounts: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5 and parallels).

Reflecting the earliest Jewish-Christian kerygma, Paul specifies in Romans 1:4 that Jesus' sonship (which is a metaphor denoting "enthronement") begins with the resurrection-ascension. Paul identifies Jesus' resurrection with his ascension, that is, with his enthronement. Like John, Paul knows nothing of Luke's historicization of a forty-day period separating the resurrection and ascension. For John and Paul, the resurrection is the ascension. Acts 13:33 also specifies that Jesus' sonship commences with the resurrection: "This same, God hath fulfilled to our children, raising up Jesus, as in the second psalm also is written: thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee." The declaration of sonship in the transfiguration accounts agrees with the paradigm of Romans 1:4 and Acts 13:33, for the transfiguration account is by inference assimilated to the resurrection in 2 Peter 1:16-18. In the Christian scriptures, there is no divine declaration of Jesus' sonship with reference to his virginal conception or virgin birth, for in the Jewish sphere of scripture "sonship" denotes enthronement, and this, from at least one "temporal" perspective, commences with Jesus' resurrection-ascension.

It is true that various apocryphal texts as well as variant readings of the canonical gospels record a divine declaration of sonship at Jesus' baptism. If we accept this tradition, and we see no reason to exclude it from consideration as a tradition held sacred by early Christians, we can view it as a proleptic announcement of the sonship which begins with the enthronement effected by the resurrection-ascension. The justification for the proleptic declaration would be the traditional resurrection symbolism of baptism. According to Paul in Romans 6 and elsewhere, when one rises from the baptismal water, one is risen with Jesus from death and seated, that is, enthroned, in celestial realms. Thus baptism functions as a symbol of death and resurrection, and therefore of enthronement. In accord with this symbolism, the early second-century CE Syriac *Odes of Solomon* 24 represents the baptism of Jesus as an apocalyptic event entailing cosmic destruction and renewal. The symbolism of sonship as it relates to Jesus derives ultimately from the so-called "enthronement" Psalms. Scholarship has recognized that when a king was enthroned in ancient Israel, he was understood as having been enthroned by God, and this enthronement was metaphorically called divine sonship. The king was analogically denominated "Elohim" (God) by virtue of the enthronement ceremony, during which the liturgical enthronement Psalms (e.g., Psalms 2, 110, etc.) were ritually chanted.

To summarize our argumentation up to this point: The Good Friday singularity simultaneously and instantaneously embraces what later came to be portrayed as “separate” events of crucifixion, transfiguration, resurrection, ascension, outpouring of the spirit, and *parousia*. These were originally not considered separate events in an absolute sense, but separate aspects or modes of the Good Friday singularity.⁹⁶ The overall paradigm established by our introductory explorations will assist us in integrating into our field of vision the Marian dimension/s of these same events. Acts 1:14, which pictures Mary as praying among Jesus’ followers, is the last Christian scriptural mention of Mary on the historical plane. She vanishes from the world just before Pentecost. This is because, esoterically considered from a Christian point of view, Pentecost was the revelation to the world of the Marian manifestation of the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit in Marian mode.⁹⁷ Between Acts 1:14 and 2:1, Mary was transfigured and through ascent exited the terrestrial sphere. She descended on Pentecost as the Marian spirit, which is to say, again, that the spirit descended in Marian mode.⁹⁸ Again we stress that this applies to a way of looking at things *sub specie aeternitatis*, and not to a strictly historical mode of narration, so that there is no question here of denying the various traditions of Mary’s assumption at an advanced age elsewhere than in Jerusalem long after Acts 2’s Pentecost.

According to Christian belief, the divine Wisdom, Sophia, which preexisted as Lady Wisdom before the creation of the universe (Proverbs 8, Sirach 24, Wisdom 7), manifested herself on the earthly plane in history as Mary. St. Maximilian Kolbe wrote with reference to Mary that “spiritus sanctus quasi incarnatus est.”⁹⁹ For our present purposes, we find connotative justification

⁹⁶ The reader must bear in mind that in our reflections concerning Good Friday, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Pentecost, and in what will follow regarding the assumption of Mary, we have not attempted any literal reconstruction of any supposed historical events. We are more interested in explicating the sacred significance, according to Christian thinking, of the theological symbols under consideration. Symbols and myths may at times be more effective channels of truth than the mere narration of historical events.

⁹⁷ If we hold that Jesus spoke a Semitic tongue, in which the word “spirit” would be grammatically feminine, then verses from the Christian scriptures about the spirit may be illuminated if we change the Greek masculine or neuter pronouns referring to the spirit to the appropriate feminine pronoun, “she.” We may then see that several such verses could apply in an analogical sense to the glorified, transfigured Mary. The analogical application could then be in either a direct or indirect sense.

⁹⁸ The qualifying word “mode” indicates that there is to be no confusion of “persons” in this context. Mary cannot be identified simplistically or exhaustively with the Holy Spirit. But as we will explore below, scripture, according to a traditional allegorical model, portrays the ascension of Jesus and the assumption of Mary as a single transcendent event, implying also a single “temporal locus” (in a qualified sense) for the occurrence. The assumption of Mary is a simultaneous and instantaneous ascent and descent. To paraphrase scripture (Ephesians 5:10), “She who descended is the same who ascended.” If, as in the Gospel of John, crucifixion can be viewed as glorification, then certainly both ascent and descent can be considered as a simultaneous and instantaneous event.

⁹⁹ When one overlooks the political eccentricities of the work, the following monograph presents theological arguments in favor of a hypostatic union of the Holy Spirit with Mary, the central thesis of which would seem difficult to refute from a Christian dogmatic perspective: Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and Its Religious Expressions* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987). A rather weak attack of Boff’s central thesis is found in George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), pp. 261-263. Tavard insists Boff’s idea of a hypostatic union of the Holy Spirit and Mary “must be rejected”

for the possibility of hypostatic union of Mary and Lady Wisdom in the implicit principles contained in Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* 3, q. 3, a. 7, from which we offer the following excerpt:

Hence it may not be said that a divine Person so assumed one human nature as to be unable to assume another. For it would seem to follow from this that the Person of the divine nature was so comprehended by one human nature as to be unable to assume another to its Person; and this is impossible, for the Uncreated cannot be comprehended by any creature.

These observations imply that for Christian theology there is no reason why the mystery of hypostatic union must be restricted to Jesus and the Word. (We leave aside for the moment the fact that Aquinas has taken the matter beyond what Judaism, and later Islam, considers acceptable). For Aquinas, the Word can be hypostatically united with persons other than Jesus. The connotation we draw from this is that the Holy Spirit can also hypostatically unite with human persons. And the Marian doctrinal heritage of ancient Jewish Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy all imply, especially in their official Marian liturgies that cite from Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24, that at the very least Kolbe remains within the authentic fields of Christian tradition when he speaks of a “quasi” incarnation of Wisdom in the form of the Holy Spirit with reference to Mary.

If the evidence cited above is taken at face value, then certainly a Christian thinker should not dismiss *a priori* the possibility of a hypostatic union of Wisdom in the form of the Holy Spirit with Mary. But since in Christian thought Mary and Jesus are one, we would not necessarily be dealing with two hypostatic unions, but perhaps with a single union in dual mode,¹⁰⁰ embracing male and female coordinates, reconstituting the sacred primordial androgynous, according to the sense proposed in later Jewish kabbalistic understandings of Genesis 1:26-27. It is by virtue of her union with Lady Wisdom that Mary is traditionally called the *sedes sapientiae*, the seat, or throne, of Wisdom. Yet there can be no simplistic identification of Mary with the divine Wisdom or Holy Spirit. Just as in Jesus the celestial and earthly natures were united and not confused or identical with each other, so the preexistent Sophia was united in non-identitative mode with the humanity of the historical person Mary. As Thomas Aquinas teaches that Jesus' humanity cannot exhaustively embrace the eternal Word, so the Mary's human nature could in no way exhaustively “assimilate” the eternal Wisdom. We must insist upon this point, for from both an Islamic and Christian-Thomistic posture, to identify any human person simplistically with the divine is unacceptable.

out “of fidelity to the patristic and medieval tradition” (*ibid.*, p. 263), without, however, taking into account the esoteric sources in tradition that point precisely to such a possibility of hypostatic union between the Virgin and the Spirit. In the same work, curiously Tavard incorrectly labels the ancient *Gospel of the Hebrews*, in which Jesus refers to “my mother the Holy Spirit” as a Gnostic rather than an early Jewish-Christian gospel text (*ibid.*, pp. 22-23).

¹⁰⁰ On the dual-unitive hypostatic union (the terminology is our own) of Mary and Jesus, see the list of various theologians, differing widely in quality, referred to in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Test Everything: Hold Fast to What Is Good*. Translated by Angelo Scola and Maria Shady (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), pp. 45-46.

As long as the term “hypostatic union” is understood analogically as akin to “theophanic in-presencing,”¹⁰¹ or in scriptural language as “the descent of the spirit,” rather than in a sense that is literal (especially physical) and exhaustive, the model of hypostatic union can be reconciled to a certain extent with Qur’anic and Jewish scriptural paradigms when esoterically understood. God’s glory descended and dwelt in the Temple of Solomon. In the same way, the Qur’an embodies (inliterates) the divine Glory. In the Christian economy, the Word tabernacled in humanity and “we saw his glory” (John 1:14).¹⁰² Ultimately, when speaking of a purported sacred “mystery,” all language is limitative on account of its metaphorical, analogical, or symbolical nature. This is not to imply that human *ratio* cannot or should not aim at ever-increasing precision in the articulation of theological truths. But from the perspective of pure intellection, both formulations of “hypostatic union” and “theophanic in-presencing” are essentially “non-literal.”

According to this paradigm, to use Christian terminology, Jesus is hypostatically united with the Word, Mary with Wisdom. But given that the human nature of neither can exhaustively embrace the eternal Word or the preexistent Wisdom,¹⁰³ the “Trinity” can never be designated as “Father, Jesus, and spirit,” or as “Father, Jesus, and Mary,” but only as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” This formula also corresponds, in a different ordering, to “Father, mother, and son”—all three terms being strictly metaphorical when applied to the divine realm). It is precisely the “triad” of God, Jesus, and Mary which is condemned, and rightly so even from a Christian perspective, in the Qur’an: “And when God saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside God? He saith: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right” (*sura* 5:116). No less a Christian authority than Thomas Aquinas could have approved of this Qur’anic censure, given his teaching on the non-identity between Jesus’ created human nature and the divine Word. *Sura* 4:171 reinforces *sura* 5:116 and augments it: “O People of the

¹⁰¹ The term “theophanic in-presencing” is our own, but it is inspired by the system of the great Sufi philosopher Ibn al-‘Arabi.

¹⁰² John 1:14 literally reads: “And the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled in us.” The German Catholic theologian Matthias Scheeben and others of his school proposed the thesis that the union of believers with the Word analogically and profoundly mirrors the hypostatic union between Jesus and the Word, and actually flows mystically from it. When we translate John 1:14’s Greek preposition *en* literally with “in” rather than the more usual paraphrase “among,” it becomes clearer that John 1:14 is speaking of the Word becoming flesh in all of humanity, without restriction to Jesus, though the modes involved certainly are variegated. The classical “incarnation” exegesis of the Fathers is therefore supported only indirectly by this phrase from John 1:14, though to be sure the surrounding verses speak directly of Jesus’ person in special ways. Yet to speak of the hypostatic union of Jesus and the Word is also to speak of the mystical union of the Word and the Church. Thus Colossians 2:9-10 is not directly a proof-text regarding Jesus’ divinity, but instead concerns the heavenly union of the Church and the Word: “For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead corporeally. And you are filled in him.” Similarly, John 10:30, “I and the Father are one,” is not directly a proof-text regarding Jesus’ unique divine nature, but rather, in light of verse 34, refers to all the faithful who share the divine nature in common with Jesus: “Is it not written in your law: I said you are gods?”

¹⁰³ As early as Irenaeus, the Church Fathers understand the Word and Wisdom as the “two hands of God” through which God created humanity, and this Word and Wisdom are identified by the same author with the Son and Spirit. This surely reflects an apostolic tradition. Compare Qur’an *sura* 38:76, according to which God’s two hands created Adam: “He said: O Iblis! What hindereth thee from falling prostrate before that which I have created with both my hands?”

scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning God save the truth. The messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and his Word which he conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from him.”

While respecting the differing accentuations regarding Jesus in Islam and the Church, we may nevertheless legitimately recognize in *sura* 4:171 an essential affirmation, at least esoterically considered, of the traditional Christian distinction between the two “natures” of “Christ.” “Messenger” denotes the earthly dimension of Jesus, while his status as “Word and spirit of God” transparently denotes his celestial dimension, or in the vocabulary of Christian tradition, the divine nature, with all due reservations and the proper qualifications naturally required by the Christian and Islamic theological wisdoms respectively.¹⁰⁴

Some would be inclined to place the beginning of Mary’s hypostatic union with Wisdom at the scene of the annunciation, where the spirit “overshadowed” her. In early Jewish-Christian thinking, Mary’s union with the spirit, however, must have begun even before her birth; this is one of the possible connotations of the later dogma concerning her immaculate conception. Given the ontological distance, which from one point of view is infinite, between Mary’s creaturely status and the preexistent Sophia, a Christian cannot allegorically interpret the Hebrew scriptural passages on Lady Wisdom (Proverbs 8, Sirach 24) as congruent with a hypostatic union of Mary and the spirit in the “atemporal” phase of Mary’s “preexistential existence.”¹⁰⁵ However, the Lady Wisdom passages may be said in Christian thought to connote a preexistential dimension to the Marian union with Wisdom, by virtue of the predestinating divine *consilium*.

Taking the Philippians 2 Christological hymn as a model, with certain modifications of course, and applying its paradigm of abasement and exaltation to Mary, a Christian thinker could say that though she was preexistentially united with the divine Wisdom, she nevertheless emptied and humbled herself, not despising to be the servant and slave of God, an essentially Qur’anic theme regarding both Jesus and his mother: “The messiah will never scorn to be a slave unto God” (*sura* 4:172); “The messiah . . . his mother was a saintly woman” (*sura* 5:75).¹⁰⁶ And like Jesus, Mary humbled herself and God was well pleased with her humility and deigned to give her a name which would be blessed in all generations. She remained a servant of God until her earthly end. But

¹⁰⁴ It is worth noting that the Qur’ān repeatedly proclaims of Jesus that “he is the (or, ‘a’) Word of God.” This goes further than any passage of the New Testament, even John chapter 1, in associating the divine Word with the human dimension of Jesus. The Qur’ānic “identitative” association of the Logos and Jesus, denoted by the implied word “is,” brings to mind what Christian authors label the “union” of the “two natures.” Thus the Qur’ān, while accentuating the humanity of Jesus more forcefully than does Christianity, nevertheless also alludes to the “union” of Jesus and the Word in a more explicit manner than can be found in the Church’s canonical texts.

¹⁰⁵ We are referring, naturally, to Plato’s analogical doctrine of the preexistence of the soul. The phrase “preexistential existence” is far from a nonsensical play on words. We model it after the paradoxical utterance of Jesus in the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas logion* 19: “Blessed is he who existed before he existed.” Irenaeus was the first Christian author to apply this *logion* to Jesus. If it may be applied to the messiah, then given Mary’s bond with him, and her own anagogical “hypostatic” union with the divine Wisdom, which mirrors Jesus’ union with the Word, then we may justly also apply this Thomas *logion* to Mary in an accommodated sense.

¹⁰⁶ To call Jesus a slave or servant of God should not offend Christians. The same title is used throughout the New Testament to describe Jesus. E.g., according to Philippians 2:7, Jesus “emptied himself and took the form of a slave.”

with Mary's transfiguration, the bonds of human flesh are loosed and she "assumes" once again her union with the unbounded *Spiritus Sophiae* in the transparent mode she had "proleptically" enjoyed in her preexistential state. On Pentecost she is transfigured; she ascends to heaven, and "then" descends to earth in Paracletic mode to dwell in the hearts of believers as their teacher.¹⁰⁷ Again, in all this a Christian thinker would be speaking *sub specie aeternitatis*, and not in an historical mode of narration.

The episode in the Gospel of John between Jesus and Mary Magdalene in the garden implies that Jesus' resurrection involved an ascent to God followed by a descent back to earth (the spatial designations are all strictly metaphors for "states" rather than "localities"). In the transitional state in which the Magdalene encounters him, he warns: "Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (20:17). Yet soon thereafter, he invites the apostles to touch him, implying he had ascended in the "meanwhile." In John, however, Jesus' death is his glorification, it is his resurrection and ascension, so that esoterically viewed Jesus "did not die" but was raised to heaven. The Qur'an's insistence that, according to a particular manner of accentuation, Jesus did not die but was raised to God, agrees eminently with the Johannine paradigm. Now, if Mary's "departure" from the earthly scene on Pentecost day is viewed as an end which is simultaneously glorification and ascent to God, then the debates within the Church, one side arguing that Mary never died but was raised deathless to God, the other side arguing that Mary died a natural death and was then resurrected and assumed into heaven, these debates and opposing viewpoints can be seen as archetypally parallel to the "disagreements" between the Church and the Qur'an on whether Jesus passed into heaven through deathless ascension or through death followed by resurrection.

Some eccentric Shi'ite gnostics were similarly divided on the question of whether Fatima ascended to heaven after death or in a deathless mode. Just as both positions on Jesus' departure can be reconciled dialectically, so the intra-Church debates about the end of Mary's life on earth can also be synthesized. Death cannot apply to the preexistent *logos*; similarly, if Mary died a natural death, such death can apply only to her earthly nature, not to the preexistent *sophia* "theophanically in-presenced," or united with her humanity. Thus what are considered the theophanic "union" of earthly and celestial dimensions in Jesus explains the Qur'anic and Christian divergences concerning Jesus' departure from the world. And the notion of the theophanic union of Mary with preexistent Sophia helps explain the disagreements among Catholic theologians concerning Mary's departure from the world.

As we observed above, the statement that Jesus is the "son of God" is a metaphorical statement principally meaning that he has been enthroned. Mary's own enthronement is reflected in her reception of the metaphorical title daughter of God. The scriptural passages on the ascension of

¹⁰⁷ Concerning the mutually interpenetrating models of the Marian and Muhammadan dimensions of the Paraclete, both are eschatological within their own parameters. The eschatological dimension of the Muhammadan substance of the Paraclete is made transparent in the following *hadith*, which given the equation Paraclete = Muhammad (in non-exhaustive mode), implies that the "historical" Muhammad lived, from the transcendent perspective, at the "end of the world": "The Prophet said, Jesus ('a) said, We bring what is revealed for you, but as for the interpretation, it will be brought by the Paraclete (*fārqilīT*) at the end of time. (*'Awālī al-La'ālī*, 4, 124)." Quoted in chapter 18 of *Jesus through Shi'ite Narrations: Selected by Mahdi Muntazir Qaim*. Translated by Al-Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen. (Qum, Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 2004). Online version available at: <http://al-islam.org/jesus_shiite_narrations/>; accessed 25 Feb. 2021.

Jesus are well known. But given the unbreakable unity between Mary and Christ in Christian thought, one would be justified in applying in an analogical sense the verses on Jesus' resurrection and ascension to Mary's assumption. Jesus by his ascension bestows upon creation the spirit, manifested in Marian mode. We could also apply the texts that speak of Jesus' earthly end to that of Mary, and by this procedure we may uncover doctrinal insights concerning Mary's own earthly destiny, assumption, and enthronement as "daughter of God."

The Letter to the Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes Psalm 45:7-8 and applies the passage to the ascension or enthronement of Jesus. Yet when we read the Psalm itself, we discover in verse 10: "The queen hath stood on thy right hand." Who can this queen be for a Christian, allegorically considered, if not Mary? Qur'an *sura* 23:50 mystically refers, according to one exegetical possibility, to the ascension of Jesus and Mary as a single event: "and we appointed the son of Mary, and his mother, for a sign: and we prepared an abode for them in an elevated part of the earth, being a place of quiet and security, and watered with running springs." Psalm 45 also presents the enthronement of the heavenly king and queen, in Christian tradition corresponding allegorically to Jesus and Mary. According to traditional exegesis, Psalm 131:8 speaks anagogically of the ascension into heaven of Jesus and Mary, the latter referred to as the ark, as an inseparable event: "Arise, O lord, into thy resting place: thou and the ark, which thou hast sanctified." Revelation 11:19-12:1 contains a vision—in a direct or indirect sense is inessential for our present purposes—of the ascended Mary as ark of the covenant: "And the temple of God was opened in heaven: and the ark of his testament was seen in his temple, and there were lightnings, and voices, and an earthquake, and great hail. and a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars."

Additional biblical verses may apply allegorically in Christian thought to Mary's assumption. The "varieties" of the queen in Psalm 45 are traditionally interpreted as the divine graces bestowed upon Mary. Compare the passage with Ephesians 4:7-10:

- 7 But to every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ.
- 8 Wherefore he saith: ascending on high, he led captivity captive; he gave gifts to men.
- 9 now that he ascended, what is it, but because he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?
- 10 he that descended is the same also that ascended above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

The "lower parts of the earth" refer primarily not to the "underworld," but to the earth itself as "lower" in comparison to the transcendent heavens. A Marian application of the Ephesians verses would be: "Now that she ascended, what is it, but because she also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? She that descended is the same also that ascended above all the heavens, that she might fill all things." Compare Sirach 24:45 according to the Latin version: "I will penetrate to all the lower parts of the earth, and will behold all that sleep, and will enlighten all that hope in God" (*penetrabo inferiores partes terrae et inspiciam omnes dormientes et inluminabo sperantes in Deo*). Sirach 24:26: "Come over to me, all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits" (*transite ad me omnes qui concupiscitis me et a generationibus meis implemini*). Consider also Sirach 24:5-6:

5 Alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven
and have walked in the depths of the abyss.

6 In the waves of the sea, in the whole earth,
and in every people and nation I have gotten a possession.

Ephesians finds a parallel in Sirach 1:10: “And he poured her [Wisdom] out upon all his works, and upon all flesh according to his gift, and hath given her to them that love him” (*et effudit illam super omnia opera sua et super omnem carnem secundum datum suum et praebuit illam diligentibus se*). On Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel, who prophesied that God would pour out his spirit upon all flesh, wording strikingly parallel to Sirach 1:10. The Wisdom and spirit are essentially the same heavenly entity, and in pietistic Christian thought the spirit poured out on Pentecost is the spirit of the glorified, transfigured Mary, that is to say, the spirit in Marian mode. The eschatological outpouring of the spirit in Joel and Acts mirrors the primordial outpouring of Wisdom in Sirach. Sirach 1:9 says that God created Wisdom “in the Holy Spirit.” This signifies that the uncreated divine dimension is the spirit, whereas Wisdom is the created dimension (which from another standpoint is but the pre-mundane entity which manifests itself in the created world).

Psalm 110 is applied to Jesus’ enthronement in Hebrews 1, but the same Psalm is also applied to Mary in traditional exegesis, specifically verse 3: “From the womb before the daystar I begot thee.” One must recall that in the Psalms, “to beget” primarily means “to enthrone.” Speaking in metaphorical language, if the *logos* is begotten, he is begotten from the divine womb, which is the spirit, Lady Wisdom, which on the earthly plane is manifested as Mary in Christian thinking. “From the womb before the daystar I begot thee” can be interpreted in more than one sense. It could mean that the begetting in question occurred before the daystar, or it could mean that the womb existed before the daystar, and from that womb the begetting issues forth. If we interpret it as a begetting from the womb which existed before the daystar, then we could say that the womb of the spirit existed before the daystar; and the daystar is the light-bearer, in Latin “lucifer.” Therefore this begetting, this birth is immaculate, for it occurs before Lucifer’s “fall.” The divine womb is immaculate also on the earthly plane, and from this follows the immaculate conception of Mary and the virginal conception and birth of her son Jesus. So goes the odyssey of Christian allegorical and anagogical exegesis.

Luke’s temporal placement of the Holy Spirit’s descent upon the disciples on Pentecost forty days after the resurrection is a necessary literary-theological and liturgical historicization of what originally was thought of as an essentially or ultimately supra-temporal event. Scholars have long recognized that this forty-day schema is found only in Luke. This furthermore co-exists with another chronological version of events found in Luke 24, according to which both the ascension and resurrection occurred on “resurrection Sunday.” The latter chronology of ascension on resurrection Sunday is shared by the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John. Yet, as we observed in our introductory explorations into the Good Friday singularity, other verses in the Christian scriptures “push back” the resurrection-ascension to Good Friday itself.

Viewed from this last, most ancient evangelical perspective, we can deduce at least one of the reasons why there is no recorded appearance of the resurrected Jesus to his mother Mary. John records that on resurrection Sunday, Jesus breathed the spirit into his disciples. This is the Johannine account of what in Luke is placed on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost. The spirit he breathed on them was the Marian spirit, the transfigured spirit of Mary, the Holy Spirit in Marian

mode. In view of their inseparable spiritual unity, Mary was, *sub specie aeternitatis*, transfigured and raised in the same “instant” as was Jesus. She was simply no longer on the earthly plane, in a restrictive sense, that is, in an “unglorified” state, for Jesus to appear to her on the “day” of his resurrection-ascension. But this is neither the last word, nor the only possible angle of theological vision in this regard. For if one, like John, views Jesus’ “crucifixion” as his glorification and return to God, then Mary would have witnessed the “resurrection,” for John informs us that Mary (presented anonymously and so symbolically as the “mother”) was standing at the foot of the cross on Good Friday.

Finally, let us not overlook the fact that the Christians of the east have since the beginning of the Church celebrated Easter on the West’s Good Friday.¹⁰⁸ The theological paradigm that “collapses” Good Friday and Easter together into a singularity is startling in its implications for Christian theology and history.¹⁰⁹ It is no wonder that in the second century the bishop of Rome excommunicated the entire body of eastern Christianity on account of its divergent feast day for Easter. Thanks to the efforts of the peaceful Irenaeus, the west was convinced that unity could coexist with diversity of theological articulation and vision, and the excommunication was overturned.

In conclusion, let us return to the ultimate fount of Christian and Islamic Marian traditions, namely, the Jewish theme of Lady Wisdom. This chapter has followed various Christian and Islamic threads that allegorically transform Lady Wisdom in Marian directions. These trajectories stand in stark contrast to the main direction that post-Tanakh Jewish sources took the entity of Lady Wisdom. That direction was the Torah. We see this not only in the Targumic correlation between Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth,” and Proverbs 8:22, “The LORD made/possessed me as the beginning of His way, the first of His works of old.” The basis of the correlation is the shared keyword “beginning.” The *Targum Neofiti* thus renders Genesis 1:1: “From the beginning with wisdom the Memra of the Lord created and perfected the heavens and the earth.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ See Anton Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1958), p. 174.

¹⁰⁹ For instance, if Good Friday and Easter intersect atemporally, then the whole question of the “empty tomb” appears in a new light for Christian theology. In the primitive *Gospel of Thomas* as well as in the New Testament epistles *en toto*, there is no concern at all with the idea of an empty tomb. The issue arises only in the canonical gospels, which reflect a secondary historicization and segmentation of the Good Friday singularity refracted as symbolically independent “events” projected onto the plane of history. If Easter and Good Friday coincide at a certain point, then we may say that Jesus ascended to God from the cross. This insight is the direct cause of the debates within the early Church concerning the fate of Jesus’ body and the nature of his transfigured *corpus*. We are here at the very limits that Christian thought and discourse can approach the “event horizon” of a sacred mystery of singularity which though supra-temporal, nevertheless participates in the vicissitudes of spacetime. The nature of Good Friday for Christian belief is such that the point of its singularity can be recognized by theological vision only when all its aspects (which appear as historicized refractions in the gospels) “collapse” together. It cannot be discerned as long as the various “aspects” remain under separate consideration as distinct events in the absolute or literal “historical” sense.

¹¹⁰ Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* (The Aramaic Bible Volume 1A; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 52.

We have seen how Christian allegorical exegesis sees Mary in the queen of Psalm 45:10: “Kings’ daughters are among thy favourites; at thy right hand doth stand the queen in gold of Ophir.” It is thus enlightening to see that the Psalms Targum identifies this verse’s queen with the Torah: “*The provinces of the kingdom come to welcome you and to honor you, while the book of Torah is stationed at your right side, and written in gold from Ophir.*”¹¹¹

Often critical scholarship holds that Genesis 1:1 and Proverbs 8:22 were associated with each other only in post-Tanakh Jewish sources. That is, only in the Targumic post-Biblical period was Genesis 1:1’s “beginning” identified as the Torah, and only at this late stage was Proverbs 8’s Lady Wisdom identified as the Torah. This opinion, however, completely overlooks the multiple allusions to Proverbs 8 in the two Torah hymns Psalm 19 and Psalm 119.¹¹² The Psalter’s adaptation of language used by Proverbs 8’s Lady Wisdom to describe the Torah indicates that already in the Biblical period Lady Wisdom was associated with the Torah. Whether or not the author of Proverbs intended in 8:22 an allusion to Genesis 1:1, the authors of Psalms 19 and 119 likely would already have made such a link in their own minds. Evidence for this surmise are Psalm 19A’s allusions to Genesis 1. Regardless of such time-lines, it is clear from Psalm 119 that already in the Biblical period love of the Torah and love of her study formed a pillar of Judaism.

¹¹¹ Edward M. Cook, *The Psalms Targum: An English Translation* (2001): <<http://www.targum.info/pss/ps2.htm>>; accessed 22 Feb. 2021.

¹¹² On the allusions to Proverbs 8 in Psalms 19 and 119, see Keith L. Yoder, Samuel Zinner, *Psalm 119 Eight Key Torah Terms’ Gender Based Distribution Patterns* (University of Massachusetts Amherst ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst Gallery Expert Gallery): <<https://works.bepress.com/klyoder/52/>>; accessed 22 Feb. 2021.

10. On the Possibility of the Multiplicity of Logos Incarnations
Some Denotative Christic and Connotative Marian Reflections Based on Thomas Aquinas
Summa Theologiae, Tertia Pars, 3, Articles 5, 7, and 8

Summa Theologiae 3, 3, a 5: Whether each of the Divine Persons could have assumed human nature?

Whatever the son can do, so can the Father and the Holy Ghost, otherwise the power of the three Persons would not be one. But the son was able to become incarnate. Therefore the Father and the Holy Ghost were able to become incarnate. . . .

Therefore the divine power could have united human nature to the Person of the Father or of the Holy Ghost, as it united it to the Person of the son. and hence we must say that the Father or the Holy Ghost could have assumed flesh even as the son.

Summa theologiae 3, 3, article 5 affirms not only that the *logos*, but also the Holy Spirit can unite hypostatically with a human being. Thus it is connotatively possible within the confines of Catholic theology, based on this Aquinas passage, that Mary could conceivably be an “incarnation” of the Holy Spirit. Based on sacred scripture and tradition, from a Christian viewpoint it is at the very least probable that Mary was an “incarnation” of the Holy Spirit, and additional material from scripture and tradition can be gathered in order to offer evidence for the possible validity of this claim. St. Maximilian Kolbe teaches that Mary is a “quasi” incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Sirach 24:4 has Lady Wisdom refer to “my throne,” and this must be the ultimate source of the Marian name *Sedes Sapientiae*. The theological implications are enormous for Mariology, for the following conclusion obtains in this regard for Christian thinkers: The throne upon which primordial celestial Lady Wisdom sits is none other than Mary. That is, the foundation upon which the preexistent Wisdom rests is the created human nature of Wisdom “incarnate,” Mary. In short, the title *Sedes Sapientiae* implies a hypostatic union of Mary and Lady Wisdom, the latter being none other than the spirit of God. The Marian title “spouse of the Holy Spirit” implies a “union” between Mary and the spirit, and that the mode of this union might be hypostatic is, as we have seen, connotatively possible from a Thomistic perspective.

The ancient *Gospel of the Hebrews*, accepted by Jerome as authentic, has Jesus refer to “my mother the Holy Spirit.” This anagogically suggests that Mary might be an incarnation of the spirit in some sense. The *Gospel of the Hebrews*, or at least a later accretion thereto, also teaches that the Mary preexisted on the celestial plane as the archangel Michael. The name Michael, which means, “like God” (whether as a question or a statement is not important in this context), functions here as a symbol of a celestial or “divine” nature, once again implying that Mary possesses not only a human aspect, but a “divine” dimension as well. Jewish-Christian theology similarly identified Jesus with both Gabriel (cf. the anti-Gnostic *Epistle of the Apostles* ch. 14, roughly contemporaneous with the Gospel of John) and Michael (cf. the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Parable 8); since the name Gabriel in Hebrew means “mighty man,” Gabriel transparently refers symbolically to the human nature of Jesus, whereas Jesus’ “Michaelian” aspect as ascended head of the Church and of the cosmos, transparently refers symbolically to Jesus’ “divine” nature. The Great Church,

not recognizing the metaphorical and symbolic nature of Jewish Christianity's theological discourse, naturally misinterpreted such language as heretical. We further recall that the Christian liturgies, East and West, have in all ages universally applied the Lady Wisdom biblical passages to the Mary. One also recalls in this context that both Judaism and primitive Jewish Christianity described the spirit of God as a feminine being, reminiscent of Lady Wisdom.

We could further argue, by analogy, with reference to *Summa Theologiae* 3, 3, article 7, which is explicated below, that just as the *logos* could hypostatically unite with human beings other than Jesus, so could the divine Sophia (the Holy Spirit) hypostatically unite with a multiplicity of human beings, either simultaneously or successively.

Summa Theologiae 3, 3, article 7: Whether one divine Person can assume two human natures?

Whatever the Father can do, that also can the son do. But after incarnation the Father can still assume a human nature distinct from that which the son has assumed; for in nothing is the power of the Father or the son lessened by incarnation of the son. Therefore it seems that after incarnation the son can assume another human nature distinct from the one he has assumed.

I answer that, What has power for one thing, and no more, has a power limited to one. Now the power of a divine Person is infinite, nor can it be limited by any created thing. Hence it may not be said that a divine Person so assumed one human nature as to be unable to assume another. For it would seem to follow from this that the Personality of the divine nature was so comprehended by one human nature as to be unable to assume another to its Personality; and this is impossible, for the Uncreated cannot be comprehended by any creature. Hence it is plain that, whether we consider the divine Person in regard to his power, which is the principle of the union, or in regard to his Personality, which is the term of the union, it has to be said that the divine Person, over and beyond the human nature which he has assumed, can assume another distinct human nature.

Reply to Objection 1. A created nature is completed in its essentials by its form, which is multiplied according to the division of matter. and hence, if the composition of matter and form constitutes a new suppositum, the consequence is that the nature is multiplied by the multiplication of supposita. But in the mystery of incarnation the union of form and matter, i.e. of soul and body, does not constitute a new suppositum, as was said above (6). Hence there can be a numerical multitude on the part of the nature, on account of the division of matter, without distinction of supposita.

Reply to Objection 2. For a man who has on two garments is not said to be "two persons clothed," but "one clothed with two garments"; and whoever has two qualities is designated in the singular as "such by reason of the two qualities." now the assumed nature is, as it were, a garment... and hence, if the divine Person were to assume two human natures, he

would be called, on account of the unity of suppositum, one man having two human natures. . . [I]f two divine Persons were to assume one singular human nature, they would be said to be one man. . .

Summa Theologiae 3, 3, article 7 contains Aquinas' clear affirmation that the *logos*, the eternal Word of God, can hypostatically unite with human beings other than Jesus. This obviously necessitates that although the *logos* hypostatically united with the man Jesus, nevertheless there can be no simplistic identity which equates Jesus' created humanity with the uncreated Word, otherwise a contingent reality would have exhaustively circumscribed the divine *logos*, which is clearly impossible according to Aquinas.¹¹³ The Replies to Objections 1 and 2 establish that the divine unity of the eternal *logos* would not be compromised even by a multiplicity of simultaneous incarnations, for the unity of *suppositum* would remain integrally intact.

One must qualify here that within the strict confines of Thomism, reflecting its understandable Christian confessional function and framework, though granting the possibility of the *logos* assuming a human nature other than that of Jesus', Thomas, in conformity with the accentuations of traditional Christian dogma, might well consider this theoretical possibility as either improbable, improper, or unfitting, given the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus' unique creative and mediatorial roles in creation and the redemptive new creation respectively. We are therefore confronted with the question as to whether in Christian thinking an incarnation of the *logos* after Jesus would imply an imperfection in the unicity of the divine will relating to creation and the new creation, that is, would this detract from what Christian doctrine believes is the unicity of the cosmic redemption by Jesus?

The possibility of multiple incarnations in itself relates to the question of the diversity of religions. The various revelations naturally understand the topic of *logos* manifestation/s in different senses. Certainly Hebrews 1:1-2 speaks of *logos* manifestations as having occurred throughout salvation history in various modes and in different degrees. Wisdom 7:27, which Thomas also employs, as we will explore below, to explain the possibility of multiple manifestations of the unitary *logos*, indicates indirectly more than a mere possibility of incarnational multiplicity. This verse, which strictly speaking refers to Wisdom, and only indirectly to the Word (*logos*),¹¹⁴ states that Wisdom "has," past tense, passed into many holy souls and prophets in many nations. Admittedly the verse does not specify the mode of such "indwelling,"¹¹⁵ but we would maintain that

¹¹³ The angelic doctor also explores the question of multiple Logos incarnations in his commentary on the sentences of Lombard; see *Sententiarum lib. 3 d1 q.2 a5*.

¹¹⁴ This quality of "indirectness" is also reflected in the fact that the Jewish scriptural passages regarding Lady Wisdom, beginning with Proverbs 8, are never directly quoted in the New Testament with reference to Jesus as the Wisdom of God. The Lady Wisdom passages are always alluded to only indirectly, so much so that a large number of biblical experts, especially Protestant exegetes, deny that the Christian scriptures ever refer in any sense, or in any context, to the Wisdom passages in Sirach 24, Wisdom 7, or Baruch 3-4.

¹¹⁵ The Church traditionally looks with disfavor upon the formulation that Jesus' incarnation is through "indwelling." Yet although the term "indwelling" can be understood in unorthodox senses, nevertheless, the term is sanctioned in the sacred scriptures: John 1:14 reads literally in the Greek: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt in us." "Us" refers to humanity, and by extension, to human nature, and this is the verse's precise point, namely, that the Word indwelt human nature, which is equivalent to the same verse's term "became flesh" (*sarx*), which does not refer directly to

Thomas is justified within a Christian theoretical framework when he refers to this verse in the context of the question of multiple *logos* incarnations. The verse's phrase "many nations" implies that God has granted revelations to nations beyond Israel, that is, beyond Judaism.¹¹⁶ This indicates the heavenly origin of the world's diverse religions.

The same Lady Wisdom referred to in Wisdom 7:27 states in Sirach 24:6b, "and in every people and nation I have gotten a possession." Here the wording "every people and nation" indicates a universality of heavenly revelation. This accords well with the Islamic tradition which holds that God sent 124,000 Prophets into all nations of the world. Consider also Qur'an *sura* 22:67: "Unto each nation have We given sacred rites . . ." and *sura* 5:48: "For each [nation] We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way [= religion]. Had God willed he could have made you one community. . . . Unto God ye will all return, and he will then inform you of that wherein ye differ."

From a Christian perspective, regarding the era before Christ's incarnation, it may be implicitly affirmed, based upon Wisdom 7:27 and Sirach 24:9-10, that there were heavenly revelations involving *logos* manifestations (in different modes including perhaps even "hypostatic" union or "incarnation" in some sense) other than the one vouchsafed to Israel.¹¹⁷ For Christian theology, the twofold question remains: Is it possible or fitting that after Christ's incarnation there be further heavenly revelations as well as further *logos* or Wisdom incarnations? From an Islamic perspective the possibility of post-Christian heavenly revelation can apply only to Islam, for this is held to be the final revelation.

However, there is also the question of the historically post-Christian Neoplatonic philosophy school, especially as represented by the sages Plotinus and Proclus. Though the early Church demonized Greek philosophy, the former's theology is in many respects a prolongation of the latter, and is specifically derived from non-Christian, at times even anti-Christian authors born centuries after Jesus' coming. We especially allude to Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, the general system of which Pseudo-Dionysius adopted in works which were to shape Christian theology to the present day in both the East and the West. In the West, both Aristotle and Plato informed the work of

the physical body as such, but rather to the flesh as contrasted with the spirit, that is, the human or natural order in contrast with the divine order. This exegesis is confirmed by the fact that the Greek text's "dwelt" literally means "tabernacled," so that when the verse continues, "and we saw his glory," it is obvious that the Logos' incarnation is understood here in accordance with the Jewish Tanakh's conception of the *kabod*, "glory," which indwelt the Tabernacle and Temple.

¹¹⁶ Isaiah 45 may imply for some interpreters that Zoroastrianism is a heavenly revelation, on the basis that the Zoroastrian king Cyrus is there spoken of as YHWH's messiah. The Church Fathers understand this passage as a prophecy of Jesus. The ancient *Epistle of Barnabas* sees in the name Cyrus an allusion to the Greek word for "Lord," Kyrios. The Church seems never to have considered or explored seriously the theological significance for the universality of revelation which is implied in the fact that Jesus is prefigured by a "pagan" Zoroastrian king. We should remark, though, that in addition to recognizing the authenticity of Islam as a heavenly revelation, Nicolas of Cusa in his *De pace fidei* also asserts that Zoroastrianism is a true heavenly religion.

¹¹⁷ That the Mosaic Torah was a Logos manifestation analogous to that involved in the case of Jesus is implied by John 1:17, especially when one views this verse in the light of Sirach 24:23 (Latin 24:32-33) and Baruch 3:28, 37-4:1 (Latin 3:28, 38-4:1), for both these passages imply that Lady Wisdom appeared personally upon earth as the Torah. The Church has in fact applied the Baruch personified Torah passage in question to the incarnation of Christ.

Aquinas, whose stature in many ways remains unrivaled. That the soul of Christian theology emanates from post-Christian, even anti-Christian (extrinsically at least) Greek “pagans” cannot be without theological significance in itself for Christians. On its own level this raises the question of how the *logos* could operate in Greek paganism centuries after Jesus’ founding of the Church.¹¹⁸

The same point of religious assimilation of Greek philosophy may be raised with reference, *mutatis mutandi*, to Islam (consider Avarroes, Ibn Sina, al-Farabi; some Sufis even considered Plato a Prophet) and to Judaism. The latter case can be illustrated above all by the examples of the Wisdom of Solomon (which scholarship universally acknowledges as a Jewish integration of the perennial Platonic doctrines), Philo, the *Zohar*, the Kabbalistic system in general, and Maimonides. Let it be remembered that Porphyry composed a treatise titled “Against the Christians,” not “Against Christ.” Indeed, in the *City of God* 19:23, Augustine quotes Porphyry as follows: “What we are going to say will certainly take some by surprise, for the gods have declared that Christ was very pious, and has become immortal, and that they cherish his memory; that the Christians, however, are polluted, contaminated, and involved in error.” Porphyry admired Jesus, and even a Christian might sympathize, to a certain degree, with his negative view of certain imperfect Christians, especially when one takes into account such incidents as St. Cyril’s apparent complicity in the murder of Plotinian philosopher Hypatia, as well as the Church’s persecution of Greek philosophers, such as Emperor Justinian’s criminalization of Greek “pagan” philosophy, which led to the harassment as well as personal and professional uprooting of countless godly sages. What an irony indeed for the worshippers of the *logos* to persecute the selfsame *logos* in the great Neoplatonic philosophers. The various persecutions against Christians were of course also “illogical,” that is, anti-*logos* actions. Regarding Hypatia, Damascius blames her murder on St. Cyril’s mob incitement, and John, Bishop of Nikiu, gleefully agrees. Socrates, the ecclesiastical historian, distances St. Cyril from the murder and condemns the rioting mob instead.

To return to the question of Islam as a post-Christian revelation, for Christian theology, at least in principle, many problems are, or can be, resolved by the fact that Islam, strictly speaking, does not claim to be a new or different religion apart from the primordial religion of Adam and, by extension, of Abraham, which manifested itself throughout history in Judaism and Christianity. In this sense, Islam does not claim to be a “new religion” after Christianity. Therefore, to the usual Christian objection against Islam, namely, that the Church awaits no new revelation after Jesus until the *parousia*, it can be answered that Islam is not a heavenly revelation of a new religion, but a revelation of the same primordial religion earlier manifested by Moses and Jesus. This is at least

¹¹⁸ For the various aspects of the Hellenistic literature and schools of philosophy which resemble the paradigms of revealed religion, see Algis Uždavinys, “From Homer to the Glorious Qur'an: Hermeneutical Strategies in the Hellenic and Islamic Traditions,” pp. 79-111. From one angle, Hellenistic philosophy represents an esoteric view or interpretation of the traditional Greek religion, equivalent to the function of Vedanta metaphysics in Hinduism. However, from another angle, the theurgic, initiatory, and general Orphic elements of Hellenistic philosophy, especially Neoplatonism, would seem to situate the latter within the boundaries of the traditional religious sphere. From this perspective, Neoplatonism is an esoteric dimension of the Greek religion itself, so that Neoplatonism could not, by definition, be practiced (and it did constitute a practice, method, or “way” as much as an intellection) apart from the traditional religion. On the general “religious” dimensions of Greek philosophy, see Algis Uždavinys, *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2004), pp. xi-xxviii.

one reason why Nicolas of Cusa explicitly asserts in his extraordinary treatise *De pace fidei* that Islam is a valid and true heavenly revelation. In the same work, Nicolas of Cusa maintains that neither Islam nor Judaism denies the incarnation or the Trinity in any sense that a well-informed Christian also would not.¹¹⁹ Pope Pius XI therefore had good precedent when he said to Cardinal Facchinetti, apostolic legate to Libya: “Do not think that you are going among infidels. Muslims attain to salvation. the ways of Providence are infinite.”¹²⁰ This reminds us of the following forceful Qur’anic passages:

Sura 2:62: Lo! those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans—whoever believeth in God and the last day and doeth right—surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.¹²¹

Sura 2:113 And the Jews say the Christians follow nothing (true), and the Christians say the Jews follow nothing (true); yet both are readers of the scripture. Even thus speak those who know not. God will judge between them on the day of resurrection concerning that wherein they differ.

Sura 2:135 And they say: Be Jews or Christians, then ye will be rightly guided. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters.

Sura 2:136 Say (O Muslims): We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto him we have surrendered.¹²²

Sura 2:139 Say (unto the People of the scripture): Dispute ye with us concerning God when he is our Lord and your Lord? Ours are our works and yours your works. We look to him alone.

¹¹⁹ Nicolas of Cusa maintains that the divine Essence in itself is neither one nor three, in that it is beyond all number when viewed from the perspective of apophysis or *via negativa*. Thus Nicolas equally relativizes both Muslim and Christian theology.

¹²⁰ See *L'Ultima*, Anno VIII 75-76, p. 261 (Florence, 1954), cited in Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad Al-'Alawi* (2nd ed. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), p. 81.

¹²¹ Cf. Acts 10:34-35: “God is not a respecter of persons. But in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh justice, is acceptable to him.” If on the one hand Jesus says “no man cometh unto the Father but through me,” on the other hand this same Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46 does not include a confessional Christian faith in him among the requirements of eternal salvation. Matthew 7:16: “By their fruits you shall know them.” This verse alone, in view of the undeniable piety found in all the great world religions, should give all people of good will pause for reflection.

¹²² Yet the Qur’an also teaches that God has exalted various Prophets above others (*sura 2:252-53*). It is perhaps understandable that each religion sees its own prophet as the most exalted of all the divine messengers.

Sura 2:140 Or say ye that Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes were Jews or Christians? Say: Do ye know best, or doth God? And who is more unjust than he who hideth a testimony which he hath received from God? God is not unaware of what ye do.

Sura 3:67 Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian; but he was an upright man who had surrendered (to God), and he was not of the idolaters.

Sura 5:69: Lo! those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Sabaean, and Christians—whosoever believeth in God and the last day and doeth right—there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.

Sura 57:28 O ye who believe! fear God and believe his apostle: two portions of his mercy will he give you. He will bestow on you light to walk in, and he will forgive you: for God is Forgiving, all-merciful:

Sura 57:29 That the People of the Book may know that they have no control over aught of the favors of God, and that these gifts of grace are in the hands of God, and that he vouchsafeth them to whom he will; for God is of infinite bounty.

At the exoteric dogmatic level, the theological problem of a further *logos* incarnation after Jesus does not exist for Islam, for the latter rejects the doctrine of incarnation. However, the situation is complicated by the fact that in esoteric Islamic mysticism, that is, in Sufi thought and in Shi'ite gnosis, Muhammad is assimilated to ideas that correspond functionally to at least some aspects of the Christian doctrine of the *logos*. This is transparent in the doctrine of the first divine emanation called the *Nur Muhammadi*, which is the “pre-eternal,” primordial, preexistent Muhammadan Light. This light was manifested in the Prophets beginning with Adam and concluded with Muhammad. According to Shi'ite gnosis, this light is transmitted in some mode also after Muhammad in the line of the twelve holy imams, and certainly 'Ali is assimilated to something comparable to the *logos* in Shi'ite *ahadith*. As we will see below, Rumi integrates even Al-Hallaj into this schema.

Therefore, the sole question that remains for Christian theology in the present context is: Can Wisdom 7:27's paradigm of possible multiple *logos* or Wisdom manifestations/incarnations preceding Christ's incarnation be possibly or fittingly applicable after Christ's incarnation? The official dogmas of the Church, understandably, cannot be expected to accentuate, or perhaps even to admit, such a fittingness, given the contextually legitimate confessional functions and confines of dogma and theology. However, on the mystical or anagogical plane, the intellective use of philosophy and analogy might identify certain trajectories of universalist potentiality and propensity in sacred scripture, the Church Fathers, and Christian mystics. These may open out onto a plane of thought that could perhaps allow for the possibility of the fittingness of incarnation/s or in a certain sense heavenly revelation/s after Jesus.

Nicolas of Cusa's affirmation regarding Islam as an authentic heavenly revelation would seem to constitute corroborating evidence for this thesis. But often these esoteric matters can only

be alluded to through ellipsis, necessarily evading clear crystallizations at the level of theological language, all language being limitative, even though adequate to the purpose. One thinks analogously in this context of how a faint star of particularly low magnitude is visible to the naked eye only when it is indirectly observed, to the side of the direct field of vision. When one attempts to focus directly on such a star, it fades from sight.

The following two scriptural passages imply a multiplicity of *logos* manifestations before and up to the time of Christ's incarnation: Wisdom 7:27, 29a: "And being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself the same, she reneweth all things, and through nations conveyeth herself into holy souls, she maketh herself the friends of God and prophets. . . . For she is more beautiful than the sun. . . ." Letter to the Hebrews 1:1-2: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers in the prophets, last of all, in these days hath spoken to us in a son." The ancient Jewish-Christian document *Clementine Homilies* 3:20 arguably goes further temporally when it has Peter explain concerning the "true Prophet" Christ: "[H]e alone has it [the Holy Spirit], who has changed his forms and his names from the beginning of the world, and so reappeared again and again in the world, until coming upon his own times, and being anointed with mercy for the works of God, he shall enjoy rest for ever." This passage implies that the true Prophet will reappear again and again until he rests in eternity, where he will "rest forever," having then "come upon his own times."¹²³

Above we quoted along with Wisdom 7:27 verse 29a's reference to Lady Wisdom's beauty. This will prepare us for the following passage from Reynold A. Nicholson who introduces a poem by Rumi that speaks of the divine Beauty, which here to a degree functions as an equivalent of the *logos*, that "clothes" itself in the great figures of sacred history from Noah to Al-Hallaj:

In a magnificent ode Jalaluddin Rumi describes how the One light shines in myriad forms through the whole universe, and how the One Essence, remaining ever the same, clothes itself from age to age in the prophets and saints who are its witnesses to mankind.

Every moment the robber Beauty rises in a different shape, ravishes the soul, and disappears.

Every instant that loved One assumes a new garment, now of eld, now of youth.
Now he plunged into the heart of the substance of the potter's clay—the spirit plunged, like a diver.

Anon he rose from the depths of mud that is moulded and baked, then he appeared in the world.

He became Noah, and at his prayer the world was flooded while he went into the ark.
He became Abraham and appeared in the midst of the fire, which turned to roses for his sake.

For a while he was roaming on the earth to pleasure himself,
Then he became Jesus and ascended to the dome of heaven and began to glorify God.
In brief, it was he that was coming and going in every generation thou hast seen,

¹²³ This is the interpretation given by Kaufmann Kohler and Louis Ginzberg in their "Clementina" entry in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906 edition): "The true prophet has appeared not in one, but in various forms; changing name and shape, he will traverse this world until he finds rest in the coming world (ib. iii. 20)."

Until at last he appeared in the form of an Arab and gained the empire of the world.
What is it that is transferred? What is transmigration in reality? The lovely winner of hearts
Became a sword and appeared in the hand of ‘Ali and became the slayer of the time.
No! no! for ‘twas even he that was crying in human shape, ‘Ana ‘l-Haqq.’
That one who mounted the scaffold was not Mansur though the foolish imagined it.
Rumi hath not spoken and will not speak words of infidelity: do not disbelieve him!
Whosoever shows disbelief is an infidel and one of those who have been doomed to hell.¹²⁴

The various scriptural witnesses to religious universality lead us back to the question of Aquinas’ specific faith, in agreement with traditional Christian theology, which holds to the exclusive and unique role of Jesus in creation and the new creation. We would suggest that this absoluteness of Jesus encompasses dialectically an aspect of expansiveness, that is, the Christic aspect of “sole” opens out onto the plane of diversity and universalism, and if this applies to the time even after Christ’s incarnation, this would not necessarily imply any defect, according to Christian standards, in the singularity of the divine intention relating to creation and new creation with regard to Christ’s unique role therein.

The attempt to integrate the revelation of Islam into this paradigm certainly complicates the issue, but it is a necessary complication in this context. The thesis which relates in some way the idea of the Holy Spirit’s “incarnation” with Islam’s “Paracletic” substance can itself go only so far within the Christian framework. This is so given not only the concrete limitations of human language, but also given that the various religions must remain separate, in order that the varying revelations retain and preserve their individual uniquenesses and “absolutivities,” God loving diversity, which is self-evident from the One’s “tendency” to issue forth through “overflow” into the cosmic many.

The Christian conception of the cosmic significance and role of Christ is typified in verses such as Colossians 1:16 and 20 which refer to Christ in his relation to heaven and earth (=cosmos) in creation and new creation. A cosmic role of Christ is also upheld in the Qur'an, which, we should not forget, confesses that not Muhammad, but Jesus is the promised messiah. Indeed, the Qur'an not only upholds a cosmic role of Christ, but this role is presented as inseparable from the cosmic significance and role of Mary, as in *sura* 21:91: “And she who was chaste, therefore We breathed into her Our spirit and made her and her son a sign for all the worlds” (*lil'alamina*, ‘to all the worlds’ = ‘cosmos’). Mary’s cosmic significance is, in part, explained by *sura* 3:42: “And when the angels said: O Mary! lo! God hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above all the women of the worlds” (compare Luke 1:42, 48). Whereas any subsequent cosmic role for a Prophet after Jesus is viewed as unfitting and contradictory for traditional Christian theology, in the Qur'an the cosmic role of Christ (inseparable from Mary) coexists simultaneously with that of Muhammad: “We sent thee (Muhammad) not save as a mercy for all the worlds” (*sura* 21:107).

From an Islamic viewpoint, this coexistence of sacred cosmic roles in the economy of salvation is possible, in part, because whereas at one level the Qur'an presents Jesus as the unique

¹²⁴ Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1914), pp. 152-153.

Christ, at another complementary level he is, on account of his humanity, integrated within the entirety of the Prophetic line: “Say: We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto him we have surrendered” (*sura* 2:136).

It is necessary at this juncture to recall the most fundamental points of the classical Christian doctrine concerning Christ’s incarnation. For this, we will rely on Aquinas’ *Summa contra gentiles* IV:39, “The doctrine of Catholic faith concerning the incarnation”:

According to the tradition of Catholic faith we must say that in Christ there is one perfect divine nature, and a perfect human nature, made up of a rational soul and human flesh; and that these two natures are united in Christ, not by mere indwelling of the one in the other, or in any accidental way, as a man is united with his garment, but in unity of one person. For since holy scripture without any distinction assigns the things of God to the man Christ, and the things of the man Christ to God, he must be one and the same person, of whom both varieties of attributes are predicable. But because opposite attributes are not predicable of one and the same subject in the same respect, and there is an opposition between the divine and human attributes that are predicated of Christ—as that he is passible and impassible, dead and immortal, and the like—these divine and human attributes must be predicated of Christ in different respects. If we consider that of which these opposite attributes are predicated, we shall find no distinction to draw, but unity appears there. But considering that according to which these several predicationes are made, there we shall see the need of drawing a distinction. Since that according to which divine attributes are predicated of Christ is different from that according to which human attributes are predicated of him, we must say that there are in him two natures, unamalgamated and unalloyed. and since that of which these human and divine attributes are predicated is one and indivisible, we must say that Christ is one person, and one suppositum, supporting a divine and a human nature. Thus alone will divine attributes duly and properly be predicated of the man Christ, and human attributes of the Word of God.

A perceptive reader will notice in the above passage that although Jesus and the Word are united as one person, or in the unity of one person, nevertheless there are two natures, divine and human, in this one person. This leads into Aquinas’ observation in *Summa Theologiae* 3, 3, a 7 regarding the distinction between the uncreated *logos* and the humanity of Christ which necessitates that the oneness of Jesus and the *logos* is not that of a simplistic identity: “Now the power of a divine Person is infinite, nor can it be limited by any created thing. . . . [T]his is impossible, for the Uncreated cannot be comprehended by any creature.”¹²⁵ This necessitates that the humanity of Jesus did not literally preexist, but that the uncreated *logos* preexisted and was the medium of creation. When therefore a hymn such as is found in Colossians 1:15ff. projects the historically incarnate “Christ Jesus” into the protological domain as medium of creation, the term “Christ Jesus” serves to

¹²⁵ To confuse the created with the uncreated would literally be blasphemy. Thus the Qur'an is right to deny that “God is the Messiah,” a statement that is directed against the heresy which denied the humanity of Jesus.

underline the fact of the oneness of person in the incarnation, yet the term cannot be taken in such a “literal” sense as to assume the preexistence of the created historical humanity of Jesus of Nazareth in pre-eternity. The Colossians hymn asserts the uncreated logos’ role in creation, and only in proleptic view of the incarnation in history is the name Jesus here joined to the figure of the *logos*.

Thus the unity of Jesus and the *logos* is from a Thomistic perspective both one and differentiated.¹²⁶ The phrase “Christ Jesus” stresses the unity of person, but because the created human nature is not the uncreated divine logos, the cosmic role of the *logos* in creation is expansive and inclusive, not reductive and exclusive. Thus, in this paradigm, the same type of hymn as found in Colossians 1:15ff. could be sung of any other *logos* incarnation, would there be such. And indeed, there are a number of extant Jewish texts which portray various prophets as *logos* “embodiments” whose cosmic roles exist in a complementary and not contradictory mode.

Sirach 50 portrays the high priest Simon as a manifestation on the earthly plane of the divine Glory (*kabod*) and of Lady Wisdom.¹²⁷ The ancient Jewish *Prayer of Joseph* states that the leading angel of heaven, called the “first-born of all creation,” “dwelt among us” in the world as the patriarch Jacob. *1 Enoch*, which Jude quotes as authentic scripture in verse 14 of his Epistle, identifies the patriarch Enoch as the Son of man and messiah. *3 Enoch* denominates Enoch, transformed in Metatron, as the lesser YHWH who has been enthroned in heaven, who has been given the name of God, and who receives the worship of the hosts of heaven (a striking parallel to the Philippians 2 Christological hymn). In *1 Enoch* 48:1-5 and 62:4-7, 9 the Son of man (Enoch) is worshipped by all beings in heaven and in earth. In *3 Enoch* 48C: 10, Enoch is explicitly identified with the Word of God alluded to in Isaiah 55:11. Ezekiel the tragedian in his *Exagoge* and also ancient Jewish Orphica give comparable hymns on the apotheosis of Moses. The *Testament of Moses* 1:14 assumes the preexistence of Moses (who is assimilated to the *logos*), just as the hymn in Colossians 1:115ff. projects into pre-eternity not only the *logos* as such, but also the historically incarnate “Christ Jesus.”

According to Christian thought, the incarnate Christ’s “exclusivism,” we repeat, can conceivably be of such a nature as to be able to include an aspect or mode of “augmentation,”

¹²⁶ It would be instructive to observe that in early Judaism, such as is recorded in *1 Enoch*, the messiah was depicted not as a human being, but as a preexistent celestial entity. The concept of the celestial messiah’s descent to the world illuminates for us the early Jewish-Christian Ebionite doctrine of the descent of “the Christ” upon the human being Jesus of Nazareth. The Ebionite doctrine properly understood is thus not a Christian heresy, but reflects, *mutatis mutandis*, an orthodox and ancient Jewish mode of belief. John A. T. Robinson presents what he believes is evidence in the New Testament of an early stream of tradition which in various ways distinguishes between Jesus and the office of messiah. See “The Most Primitive Christology of All?” in John A. T. Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies* (Studies in Biblical Theology 34; Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1962), pp. 139-153.

¹²⁷ See Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002), pp. 56-87, especially pp. 69-74. On p. 74, Fletcher-Louis catalogs the evidence from Sirach which suggests that the high priest Simon is assimilated to the preexistent Lady Wisdom. Sirach 24:8-11 applies to Lady Wisdom the images and themes of the holy tent, taking root, cedar in Lebanon, cypress, rosebushes, olive tree, growth beside water, and incense. Cf. the parallel images of Simon in Sirach 50:5, 8-9, 10, and 12, which include the themes of the sanctuary, a rooted shoot, cedar in Lebanon, cypress, roses, olive tree, growth beside water, and incense.

precisely on account of the unlimited divine nature of the preexistent *logos*. That is, Jesus' exclusivism is plenary, not restrictive, and hence it is essentially inclusive. If the cosmos is created and re-created in the *logos*, the same can be said of the Holy Spirit, that is, of Wisdom. Additionally, one must be careful to understand the implicate inclusivity of scriptural and traditional exclusivism. For instance, if Jewish tradition states that God created the cosmos for the sake of David, it also maintains the same with regard to other Tanakh worthies.

The *Gospel of Thomas* 12 continues this type of tradition, for in this *logion* Jesus says that the cosmos came into being for the sake of James the Just. There is no contradiction in this regard either in the Talmud or in *Thomas* over against the Christian doctrine which holds that all things were created in and for the *logos*. Similarly, Philo assimilates more than one Hebrew prophet to the heavenly *logos*, and even calls these various prophets *theos* (though not *ho theos*; John 1:1 similarly avoids the definite article and calls the *logos theos*, not *ho theos*). Traditional religious proclamations delivered in exclusivist language must therefore often be understood in inclusive and polyvalent senses, and ultimately in a transvalent sense when the *logos* is involved.

If in Christian thought the cosmos is re-created by Christ's sacrifice (Colossians 1:20), nevertheless the sacrifice of the *logos* cannot be restrictively identified with Golgotha. Even the Christian scriptures teach that the *logos* as lamb has been "slain from the beginning of the world" (Revelation 13:8), though of course this verse may be understood legitimately in a variety of senses which do not exclude the historical dimension of Golgotha.¹²⁸ *Zohar* 2:239b applies a Torah verse, which the Church Fathers relate to Jesus' crucifixion, to the protological celestial messiah: "He hath washed his garments in wine," even from the time of the Creation. . . . the 'spirit of God which hovered over the face of the waters' (Gen. 1, 2) is the spirit of the messiah, and from the time of the Creation he 'washed his garments in celestial wine.'¹²⁹

For the sake of completeness it would be necessary to recall that the understanding of the cross as involving a cosmic atoning sacrifice of renewal is a specifically Pauline contribution to Christian theology. This understanding of the cross appears to have been unknown in Jewish Christianity under Jesus' brother James. This indicates that neither did Jesus attribute any atoning dimension to his impending crucifixion. Consider the complete absence of the cross or any mention at all even of Christ's death in works such as the Epistle of James, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Didache*, to name only a few relevant texts.

Few Christian theologians seem to have been deeply struck by the fact that the Church's earliest Eucharistic rite, which is preserved in the *Didache*, contains not a single reference to either the cross or to the death of Jesus. The temptation to reinterpret the *Didache*'s Eucharistic liturgy as a mere agape, or Christian social "love feast," is essentially the result of the Great Church's theologians' ignorance concerning the absence of the Pauline understanding of the cross in

¹²⁸ For a parallel from Scandinavian traditions, consider the Edda mythic poem "Havamal," which we here translate from the Old Norse: "138. I know that I hung / upon the wind-swept tree / nights all through nine, / spear-pierced / and sacrificed to Odin, / myself to myself, / whence sprung / none knows, aged / the roots of the tree. 139. They helped me with no bread / nor with mead-horn. . . . 143. [B]efore the beginning; / there he rose up, / where he afterwards did come." In this sacred poem, Odin the All-Father (which the Neoplatonists would have understood as the demiurge or Logos) suffers on the World Tree (138-39) and then rises from death (143).

¹²⁹ Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, Paul P. Levertoff, *The Zohar: Volume 2* (London/New York: Soncino Press, 1984), pp. 363-364.

primitive Jewish Christianity. We might also observe that whoever wrote 2 Peter (the most ancient Church Fathers' doubts and even outright rejection of its Petrine authorship are well known), this author never once refers to either the cross or to Jesus' death, and this despite the curious positive reference to Paul in 3:15. In 2 Peter 1:16ff., where one would naturally expect a reference to the resurrection of Jesus, we instead find an account of the transfiguration upon Mount Tabor. This is explained if 2 Peter is a Jewish-Christian document, for we know from the Jewish-Christian *Apocalypse of Peter* that the transfiguration was assimilated to the ascension of Jesus. Neither is there any reference to Jesus' death or cross in the Epistle of Jude, which is intimately related to 2 Peter.

Jewish Christianity placed the emphasis upon the cross as the exaltation, not as the death, of Jesus. In this respect, the Gospel of John, which identifies the cross with Jesus' glorification and ascent to God, eminently agrees in spirit with the Jewish-Christian paradigm.¹³⁰ The same could be said, *mutatis mutandi*, of the Qur'an's insistence that Jesus was not truly slain, but was raised to God (*sura 4:157-58*). These types of dialectical "clashes" having to do with Jesus' earthly end are precisely what gave rise to the early gnostic speculations regarding the nature of Jesus' sufferings, speculations which are not always intrinsically heretical. We read the following words of Jesus in chapter 101 of the ancient *Acts of John*, which is not a heretical gnostic, but an orthodox apocryphal work: "Thou hearest that I suffered, yet did I not suffer; that I suffered not, yet did I suffer; that I was pierced, yet I was not smitten; hanged, and I was not hanged;¹³¹ that blood flowed from me, and it flowed not; and, in a word, what they say of me, that befell me not, but what they say not, that did I suffer" (M. R. James version).

The Jewish work *4 Maccabees* demonstrates that even in a Jewish context the death of a martyr could be viewed as an atoning sacrifice which effects expiation for the sins of the people and purification of the land. *4 Maccabees* 17:21-22 states of the Maccabean martyrs: "The tyrant was punished, and the nation was purified, they [the martyrs] becoming like a ransom for our nation's sin. By means of these devoted ones' blood and through their death as an expiation, divine Providence preserved Israel... ." However, no devout Jew would imagine that the expiation of sin effected by the Maccabean martyrs would annul in any way the need for the Mosaic sacrifices for sin.

Matthew 5:17-18 forcefully implies that neither would Jesus ever have advocated the abrogation of the Mosaic sacrifices for Jews, for Jesus here insists that nothing of the Torah will pass away until the end of the cosmos. James, who led Jewish Christianity after Jesus' earthly departure, and the twelve apostles, felt the same as Jesus in this regard. Thus Peter, along with the entire early Church in Jerusalem, continued attending daily Temple services, which would have involved traditional sin sacrifices, even after the miracle of Pentecost (Acts 2:46). Jewish Christianity therefore saw no contradiction between Jesus' atonement and the continuance of the Temple sacrifices for sin.¹³² According to this perspective, Jesus' expiation, like the expiation of sin

¹³⁰ We have gathered the relevant evidence on this topic in our monograph, *The Abrahamic Archetype* (Cambridge, UK: Archetype, 2011), specifically in the chapter titled, "Dialectical Synthesis of Qur'anic and Gospel Narratives: Crucifixion as Ascension."

¹³¹ The word "hanged" might suggest that this text relies on Jewish-Christian tradition.

¹³² The perspective of the Letter to the Hebrews, which argues against the continuance of the Mosaic sacrifices, must be understood as reflecting a limitative perspective that cannot be reconciled with either Judaism or Jewish-Christianity. To the objection in 9:26, "For then he

effected through the Maccabean martyrs, could not abrogate the Mosaic sacrifices for sin, which God has ordained as obligatory for Jews until the end of the world.

Paul, at least Luke claims so, performed purification sacrifices in the Temple years into his messianic ministry (Acts 21:26). Luke may therefore have believed that Paul had taught that the sins of Jews are covered by the Mosaic sacrifices, whereas the Gentiles stand in need of sacrifice also, but being non-Jews the Mosaic ordinances are inapplicable to them. Therefore their need of sacrifice is met by the messianic sacrifice. This Lucan insight constituted his central contribution to Christian theology. Luke's interpretation of Paul's teaching, however, cannot be reconciled with what one actually reads in Paul's letters.

The purpose of this brief excursus upon Jewish Christianity has been to indicate that the cosmic understanding of the cross in the new creation is a specifically Pauline interpretation of the Christic mystery. It is admittedly valid in its own domain for Christian dogma, but in view of James' theology by no means can the Pauline doctrine of the cross be considered absolute or universal for the entirety of the Church.

Erwin Preuschen writes of Origen's understanding of Jesus' death: "Origen's concept of the *logos* allowed him to make no definite statement on the redemptive work of Jesus. . . . Origen regarded the death of Jesus as a sacrifice, paralleling it with other cases of self-sacrifice for the general good."¹³³ However, it is not the case, as Preuschen avers, that Origen deviated from the Church on the subject of Jesus' death and the redemption. It is rather that Origen reflects a stream of tradition emanating from the early Church which through a legitimate theological diversity did not fully encompass the Pauline understanding of the cross. Origen's Neoplatonic training is obvious. His extensive personal contacts with Jews and Jewish Christians, however, are also well known, and it is also here and not only in Neoplatonic influence that we must seek an explanation for Origen's non-Pauline views of the cross.

Other typical Jewish and Jewish-Christian doctrines found in Origen's theology include the idea of the preexistent soul of the messiah, the preexistence of souls in general, transmigration of souls, *apokatastasis* (Judaism knows nothing of an eternal hell), and "subordinationist" Christology and Pneumatology. That many of these Jewish doctrines have parallels in neoplatonism would have only increased their appeal to Origen. The early stream of Christian tradition which Origen reflects in his understanding of the cross emanated ultimately from the Jerusalem church under James.

The Jamsean tradition by the mid-first century CE had found its way into Syrian theology; the earliest surviving witness to this theology is contained in the *Gospel of Thomas*, extant in Greek fragments and in a complete Coptic version. This ancient text represents, according to Quispel, a Syriac adaptation of an Aramaic gospel from Jerusalem, supposedly composed ca. 30-50 CE.¹³⁴

[Christ] ought to have suffered often from the beginning of the world," one could answer that according to Revelation 13:8 the lamb has indeed been slain and suffered from the foundation of the world.

¹³³ S. M. Jackson, ed., *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*: Volume 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1951), p. 273.

¹³⁴ See Gilles Quispel, "Gnosis and Alchemy: the Tabula Smaragdina," in Roelof van den Broek and Cis van Heertum (eds.), *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition* (Amsterdam: Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, 2000), pp. 321, 331. In order to explain its "Hermetic" *logia* Quispel posits also a later Alexandrian revision of the *Thomas*.

April D. DeConick explains the relationship between not only the churches of Jerusalem and Syria, but also the contrast between Syrian and Roman theology by observing that Syrian traditions have “strong roots” in Jerusalem. She also explains that Pauline theology was in large part neglected in the early Syrian churches. This resulted in a general absence in Syria of the Pauline theology of the cross as found later in Rome.¹³⁵

DeConick further remarks that early Syrian Christians “tried to imitate Jesus’ crucifixion which they understood differently from Western Christians. To them, Jesus’ crucifixion was the ultimate example of a person crucifying the flesh and its appetites. . . .”¹³⁶ This conception is certainly found in early Syriac works such as the *Liber Graduum*, a text to which DeConick often refers, but this same scholar claims that the idea of the imitation of Christ’s crucifixion is also found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. DeConick is naturally aware of the scholarly consensus which holds that the *Thomas* gospel is either unaware of or unconcerned with Jesus’ crucifixion. On the basis, however, of *logia* 28, 55, and 77 (joined with *logion* 30 in the Greek version), she contests the prevailing view. *Logia* 28 and 77 (+*logion* 30), however, do not explicitly mention Jesus’ death. DeConick resorts to what amounts to allegorical interpretation in order to see the cross in these *logia*. In themselves, these *logia* cannot constitute solid or sound scholarly evidence in the *Thomas* gospel for a belief in Jesus’ death, by crucifixion or by any other method.

As an example, in *logion* 30 DeConick sees a reference to the stone sealing Jesus’ burial cave and to the wood of the cross: “Lift the stone and you will find me there. Split the piece of wood and I am there.” Even allegorically this would seem a strange description of Jesus’ death and resurrection, given that the resurrection would precede the cross, and given that *logion* 30 mentions the stone before the wood (although the Coptic version reverses the order). More problematical, however, is the fact that according to the canonical gospels, after the stone is “rolled away” (not “lifted”) from the burial cave, Jesus is precisely not present, having been resurrected, whereas *logion* 30 states: “Lift the stone and you will find me there.” A correct exegesis of *logion* 30 would be that Jesus is thought of as the Shekhinah of God. In the Greek text Jesus as the Shekhinah is universally present in the sacred space of the liturgical cosmos. In the Coptic version Jesus as the Shekhinah is the manifestation of the primordial light and *logos*, and as such universally pervades the physical cosmos.

First we give the fragmentary Greek version according to DeConick’s reconstruction, with our own explanatory glosses in square brackets: “Jesus said, ‘Where there are three people [gathered together in prayer or for Torah meditation], God is there. and where there is one alone, I

gospel, but what Quispel sees as Hellenistic Hermetic thought from Alexandria could just as easily be explained as Jewish esoteric components emanating from a first-century Jerusalem context. On the Jerusalem origins of the *Thomas* gospel, see also Thomas Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1999). Zöckler accepts Quispel’s thesis of a later Hellenistic revision of *Thomas*. We do not doubt that this gospel, like the four canonical gospels, underwent various redactional developments, but we do contest the certitude with which these developments are geographically situated by scholars. Given the regular contact between ancient Jews in Alexandria and Jerusalem, “Alexandrian” thought was already present in first-century Jerusalem, so that “Alexandrian” thought in a document such as *Thomas* does not necessitate a geographically Alexandrian provenance for the work.

¹³⁵ April D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas: With a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2007), p. 4.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p 6.

say that I am with him. Lift the stone and you will find me there. Split the piece of wood and I am there.” The point is that in prayer one must seek diligently to uncover the hidden presence of God, and that in Torah study one must discover the text’s meaning. The Coptic version reads: “Jesus said, ‘I am the light which is above all things. I am everything. From me, everything came forth, and up to me, everything reached. Lift the stone and you will find me there. Split the piece of wood and I am there.’” Here the divine light (= *logos*) pervades the cosmos. With the Greek and Coptic versions, we might compare Qur’an *sura* 2:115: “Unto God belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is the face of God. Lo! God is all-Embracing, all-Knowing.”

DeConick’s claim that *logion* 28’s phrase “and my soul suffered in pain for human beings” might refer to Jesus’ crucifixion¹³⁷ is no more convincing than is her allegorical interpretation of *logia* 30 and 77. The same *Thomas* gospel, in DeConick’s translation, uses the word “crucify” exclusively as a metaphor for the internal conflict between *sarx* and *psyche* (*logia* 87 and 112). All previous translators render *logia* 87 and 112 with “depend,” “rely,” or a close equivalent, rather than with “crucify.”

DeConick’s translation suggestion does seem to make sense, but even if it is correct, this would apparently help to disconfirm her interpretation of *logion* 28 as containing a reference to Jesus’ physical crucifixion. This is because the only instances of the word “crucify” in the *Thomas* gospel clearly would refer to a strictly internal conflict between the flesh and the soul. In fact, the immediately following *logion* 29 suggests that *logion* 28’s reference to Jesus’ suffering in his “soul” for human beings indeed alludes to a strictly interior “crucifixion.” This is because *logion* 29 closely mirrors the conflict of *sarx* and *psyche* found in *logia* 87 and 112: “Jesus said, ‘If the flesh [*sarx*] existed for the sake of the spirit [*pneuma*], it would be a miracle. If the spirit (existed) for the sake of the body [*soma*], it would be a miracle of miracles! Nevertheless, I marvel at how this great wealth settled in this poverty.’”

Logion 29 describes the “incarnation,” not the crucifixion. That *logion* 28 speaks of the internal sufferings of the “incarnate” Jesus, rather than of the crucified Jesus, is suggested by *logion* 28’s very first line: “Jesus said, ‘I stood in the midst of the world and I appeared to them in flesh.’” In *Thomas*, reflecting Semitic anthropological vocabularic usage, the terms *pneuma* and *psyche* would seem to be roughly synonymous, as would also *sarx* and *soma*. The terms in *Thomas* are not to be understood in the strict Greek philosophical sense of material body as opposed to immaterial spirit, but rather as the contingent order or nature in contrast with the divine order or nature. In other words, we have here a contrast between the created and the uncreated orders of existence.

This leaves us with *logion* 55: “Jesus says, ‘Whoever does not hate his father and mother cannot be my disciple; and whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters and carry his cross as I do is not worthy of me.’” However else this *logion* might be interpreted, at the strictly literal level the cross here functions as a metaphor, not as a reference to a physical execution by crucifixion. *Logion* 55’s cross pertains to the earthly ministry of Jesus, not to his earthly end. By using the most graphic image of death then known, namely, Roman crucifixion, Jesus here alludes to the practice of “mortifying” familial relationships which would interfere with one’s communion with God.

We conclude, therefore, that just as in the Epistle of James, so in the *Gospel of Thomas* there is a complete silence regarding any death of Jesus. The only mention of a cross in the *Thomas* gospel represents a metaphor which is equally applicable to Jesus and to his disciples, so that the

¹³⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 133.

present consensus of scholarship concerning the absence of the crucifixion in Thomas stands justified. In Jewish-Christian texts such as *Thomas*, as in the Qur'an, the emphasis lies not on the crucifixion, but rather on the ascended Jesus.

The Pauline doctrine of the cross may be an "absolute" imperative for the Gentile churches, but the New Testament record implies another inspired trajectory of messianic faith, represented above all by James. The clear conflicts between James and Paul, which were never denied by the Church Fathers,¹³⁸ may to a degree reflect tensions resulting from a dialectical complementarity more than from an absolute contradiction. Nevertheless, in the end there is a degree of absolute contradiction that cannot be wished away.

The reality of Jewish Christianity is difficult for some Christian theologians to recognize, for the New Testament primarily (though not exclusively) consists of works which accord with the Pauline conceptions, or which at least do not openly conflict with Pauline Christianity. Almost all the writings of Jewish Christianity perished principally for reasons of climate (humidity) and ostracism already before the Great Church established its scriptural canon. More accurately we should speak of "canons," since there is no universal agreement in the churches on the matter. The Book of Acts, moreover, reflecting its Pauline sources, de-emphasizes James' role of primacy in the Church, so that the Jamsean theology can be recovered only indirectly in this source, as in the New Testament in general.¹³⁹

It is often asked, what became of the Jewish Christians? Although there are what could in a sense be called Jewish Christians who survive in Ethiopia and India, nevertheless their rites and theology as they exist today do not fully correspond with their ancient forms, having been significantly assimilated to the Great Church through the influence of various missionaries throughout the centuries. The Ethiopic Church, about 45 million strong, celebrates both Saturday and Sunday as holy days, practices obligatory circumcision, does not allow the consumption of pork, and has in their "Old Testament" canon such works as the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees. Yet although the Ethiopic Church has preserved many precious Jewish-Christian "apocryphal" works, these are mostly not included in their new Testament canon. According to its own tradition, this church descends from Jewish Christians who fled Jerusalem in 70 CE. The virtual disappearance from history of primitive Jewish Christianity's traces can be attributed to the fact that after the destruction of the Temple, these groups fled to areas where their precious manuscripts, as we have mentioned, would perish from humidity. This in part explains why the New Testament contains works principally reflecting the Pauline theology. We must also mention the Gentile-Christian misunderstanding of Jewish-Christian theology which resulted in the latter group's excommunication by the Great Church in the East and West. This saw the intentional destruction of Jewish-Christian literature, including the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac Jewish-Christian gospels, fragments of which survive only in brief quotations by the Church Fathers. Fragments of Jewish-Christian traditions were incorporated, often in slightly to heavily redacted forms, throughout the four canonical gospels of the Gentile church.

¹³⁸ For example, Victorinus writes in his Commentary on Galatians: "But clearly Paul was not able to learn anything from James, for the latter possessed a different view of the Gospel. . . . James was not an apostle, and he may even have been in heresy. Now Paul does record that he saw James: 'I saw the novelty that James was spreading around and preaching, but because I knew and spurned his blasphemy, you Galatians should also reject it.'"

¹³⁹ See Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* (NY: Continuum, 1999), pp. 98-99.

With Shlomo Pines, one may suspect that many Jewish Christians eventually entered Islam, partly on account of some of the profound conceptual and praxis correspondences between the two groups. This to a certain extent would explain the disappearance from history of an entire sector of the Church. Lastly, we would also propose that large numbers of the Islamic traditions of Jesus' sayings, which literally run into the hundreds,¹⁴⁰ were introduced to Muslims by Jewish Christians who had entered Islam, and that these '*Isa ahadith* (Jesus traditions) preserve, in varying degrees, passages from the lost Jewish-Christian gospels or oral traditions.

Nicolas of Cusa obtained his theology of the providential diversity of religions by applying analogically the contemporary astronomical model of many world systems to the domain of revelation; today we would also refer to "solar systems."¹⁴¹ In each solar system the sun around which its planets orbit is the absolute center. Yet from a larger angle of vision, one discovers that there are other solar systems, and in each the central star is the absolute center. Yet this quality of absoluteness obviously possesses an aspect of relativity. In the center of each religious "solar system," the *logos* has manifested itself as one of the various central suns, or Prophets, or incarnations (*avatara*s in Hindu terminology). Each system is perceived at the local level as absolute, and the particular system is therefore identified from this locally limited view as the entirety of the spiritual cosmos. The *logos'* aspect of absoluteness to a certain extent justifies the impression, within each local system, of self-contained absoluteness.

By analogy, the Pauline system cannot constitute the entirety of the Christian cosmos, let alone the entirety of the wider religious cosmos which embraces the diverse world religions. Aquinas' understanding of the unicity of Jesus' role in creation and new creation is in essence refined, not contradicted, by the application of Nicolas of Cusa's analogy of revelation and the multiplicity of world systems. Without having resolved all of the theological tensions involved in the matter, we would nevertheless suggest, based on the evidence presented, that it would at the very least not be intrinsically inappropriate to posit that for Christian theology not only is it possible, but it might also be fitting, for there to be incarnation/s after Jesus.

We now return to Aquinas:

Summa Theologiae 3, 3, article 8: Whether it was more fitting that the Person of the Son rather than any other Divine Person should assume human nature?

I answer that, it was most fitting that the Person of the son should become incarnate. First, on the part of the union; for such as are similar are fittingly united. Now the Person of the son, Who is the Word of God, has a certain common agreement with all creatures, because the word of the craftsman, i.e. his concept, is an exemplar likeness of whatever is made by him. Hence the Word of God, Who is his eternal concept, is the exemplar likeness of all creatures. And therefore as creatures are established in their proper species, though movably, by the participation of this likeness, so by the non-participated and personal union of the

¹⁴⁰ In addition to the Shi'ite compilation cited elsewhere in this study, various Jesus *ahadith* have been assembled in Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁴¹ For an overview of Nicolas of Cusa's thought in this regard, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*. Translated by Mario Domandi (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963).

Word with a creature, it was fitting that the creature should be restored in order to its eternal and unchangeable perfection; for the craftsman by the intelligible form of his art, whereby he fashioned his handiwork, restores it when it has fallen into ruin. Moreover, he has a particular agreement with human nature since the Word is a concept of the eternal Wisdom, from Whom all man's wisdom is derived. and hence man is perfected in wisdom (which is his proper perfection, as he is rational) by participating the Word of God, as the disciple is instructed by receiving the word of his master. Hence it is said (Sirach 1:5): "the Word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom." And hence for the consummate perfection of man it was fitting that the very Word of God should be personally united to human nature.

Thirdly, the reason for this fitness may be taken from the sin of our first parent, for which incarnation supplied the remedy. For the first man sinned by seeking knowledge, as is plain from the words of the serpent, promising to man the knowledge of good and evil. Hence it was fitting that by the Word of true knowledge man might be led back to God, having wandered from God through an inordinate thirst for knowledge.

Reply to Objection 2. The first creation of things was made by the power of God the Father through the Word; hence the second creation ought to have been brought about through the Word, by the power of God the Father, in order that restoration should correspond to creation according to 2 Cor. 5:19: "For God indeed was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."

Article 8 must be set within the greater context of *tertia pars* 3, which elsewhere clearly asserts that in addition to the *logos'* incarnational potentialities, the Holy Spirit can also become incarnate. In order to understand more fully the argumentation contained in article 8 regarding the superlative fittingness of the son's incarnation, we cite the following passage from Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles* IV:12, which bears the title, "How the son of God is called the Wisdom of God":

Wisdom in man is a habit whereby our mind is perfected in the knowledge of the highest truths: such are divine truths. Wisdom in God is his knowledge of himself. But because he does not know himself by any presentation of himself other than his essence, and his act of understanding is his essence, the wisdom of God cannot be a habit, but is the very essence of God. But the son of God is the Word and Concept of God understanding himself. The Word of God, thus conceived, is properly called 'begotten Wisdom'; hence the apostle names Christ the wisdom of God (1 Cor. I, 24). This Word of wisdom, conceived in the mind, is a manifestation of the wisdom of the mind which thereby understands: as in us acts are a manifestation of habits. Also the divine wisdom is called 'light', as consisting in a pure act of knowledge; and the manifestation of light is the brightness thence proceeding: The Word of divine wisdom therefore is fittingly called the 'brightness of light', according to the text: being the brightness of his glory (Heb. I, 3). But though the son, or Word of God, is properly called 'conceived wisdom', nevertheless the name of Wisdom, when used absolutely, must be common to the Father and the son; since the wisdom that is resplendent through the Word is the essence of the Father, and the essence of the Father is common to him with the son.

Regarding this passage, although it stresses, as does *Summa Theologiae* 3, 3, article 8, the identification of the Wisdom of God with Jesus Christ, nevertheless, Aquinas ends by clearly asserting that the designation or name “Wisdom” cannot be applied exclusively or restrictively to the eternal *logos*. This suggests the connotative possibility that the Holy Spirit is also Wisdom, and a further connotative point presents itself, based on Aquinas’ teaching in *tertia pars* 3 on the possibility of a multiplicity of *logos* incarnations, namely, that the Holy Spirit as Wisdom could hypostatically unite with a multiplicity of human beings.

Furthermore, regarding article 8, Aquinas’ comments can be qualified by amplifying the biblical references pertaining to the matter dealt with in the context. Aquinas writes that it was most fitting for the son to become incarnate firstly because the son is the Word of God which was the means through which God the Father effected creation, and secondly because Wisdom, which is the nature and goal of humanity, participates in the Word of God. The first point to make is that according to the Jewish scriptures, not only does the masculine Word participate in the act of creation, but the feminine Wisdom (the Holy Spirit) equally participates in the act of cosmic manifestation. The scriptural and post-Tanakh Jewish textual references for Lady Wisdom will suffice to establish her role in creation: Proverbs 8:22-31; Wisdom 7:22-8:1; Sirach 24:1-22.

These scriptures can be augmented by referring to Irenaeus’ *Adversus haereses* IV 20:1, a passage which refers to the son and spirit as God’s “own hands” by which he creates: “For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the son and the spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, he made all things.” Similarly, Irenaeus in his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 10 reinforces our contention that the name Wisdom of God cannot be restrictively or exclusively applied to the Word: “Now this God is glorified by his Word who is his son continually, and by the Holy Spirit who is the Wisdom of the Father of all.” Based on the relevant biblical passages and Irenaeus, a saint who has profoundly influenced Eastern and Western theology to the present day, one could justly argue that “Wisdom” as a name is directly and most properly applicable to the Holy Spirit, whereas “Wisdom” is indirectly and “less” properly (but not “improperly”) a name of the Word. Naturally Word and Wisdom both interpenetrate each other as divine personified entities, and each share in the other’s “divinity” in plenary mode. Yet the degrees of properness and fittingness with regard to their respective names cannot be canceled out on account of such plenary hypostatic “mutuality.”

Ancient Jewish texts furthermore indicate that the creative Word and Wisdom are roughly synonymous, which suggests that in one sense Word and Wisdom must represent respectively a masculine and a feminine modality of a single personified entity. Wisdom 9:1-2: “O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy Word, and by thy Wisdom hast formed man. . . .” If this text is a Greek specimen of Hebraic-based poetic synonymous parallelism, we could conclude that the Word and Wisdom, though not identical with each other in every respect, are inseparable in the work of creation. Again, if it be countered that the son is the Wisdom of God, we recall that Aquinas himself relativizes this identification, for Wisdom must pertain in some sense to all the divine “persons” or “hypostases.”

The second point to make is that it is most fitting that the masculine Word hypostatically unite with a human of the male sex, and that the feminine Wisdom hypostatically unite with a human of the female sex. Of course, on the celestial plane, the “sex” of the *logos* or of *sophia* is a metaphorical or symbolical marker. Yet the physical sexes manifest in fitting and proper ways the

non-physical and symbolical sexual states inherent in the celestial realm. This argumentation is supported by the fact that sacred scripture makes use of images and language based on physical sexes in order to describe celestial realities. In this context we recall the various passages in the Jewish scriptures which treat of the feminine figure of Lady Wisdom and of the masculine figure of the messiah. The Qur'anic *umm* and *kitab*, mother and book, should also be recalled in this context; the two terms functionally correspond to Wisdom and Word respectively.

Furthermore, it is necessary to augment Aquinas' argumentation regarding the fittingness of the *logos'* incarnation in relation to the "transgression" of Adam. Clearly, sacred scripture, beginning with Genesis 3, ascribes the primordial "transgression" to both Adam and Eve. Deutero-Paul, however, accentuates the woman's role in the "fall" in 1 Timothy 2:14: "And Adam was not seduced; but the woman being seduced, was in the transgression." And it is surely noteworthy that shortly after the majestic speech of Lady Wisdom in Sirach 24, we read in 25:33: "From the woman came the beginning of sin, and by her we all die." Lady Wisdom thus constitutes the divine antidote to the "fallen" Eve; or as Irenaeus would later write, the sinless Mary became the advocate of the sinful Eve. Now if the incarnation of the male *logos* was fitting and necessary in order to repair the ruin caused by Adam, so the incarnation of the female *sophia* would have been fitting and necessary in order to repair the ruin caused by Eve. There is ample connotative evidence in Irenaeus' doctrine of the two Eves (Eve and Mary) to justify this paradigm theologically, though all artificial schematization in this regard must naturally be avoided.¹⁴²

According to Wisdom 10:1, Lady Wisdom "delivered him [Adam] from his transgression." Here is scriptural support for the idea that not only the *logos* participates in the reversal of the ruin of humanity, but also that Sophia shares in the work of restoration. That this mutual restoration by the male *logos* and the female *sophia* is proper and fitting is implied by the very fact of the subsistence of humanity in male and female modalities. In short, the main lines of argumentation in *Summa Theologiae* 3, 3, a 8 regarding the *logos'* role in creation and restoration can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to Lady Wisdom, that is, to the Holy Spirit. This would constitute a Marian augmentation of, not necessarily a correction to, the Thomistic *logos* paradigm under consideration. If "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), Mary is the plenitude and thus source of such grace: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee" (Luke 1:28).¹⁴³

A degree of priority of Mary in the restoration of the primordial ruin is in fact implied by her role as the New Eve, for 1 Timothy 2:14 and Sirach 25:33, reflecting the Genesis 3 account, assign the principal origin or beginning of sin and death to Eve, and exonerate the man Adam entirely from

¹⁴² It is possible that Paul in Romans 5 by the phrase "one man," which refers to Adam, simultaneously also implies Eve. This same chapter's reference to the "one man" Jesus could also implicitly embrace Mary as New Eve, at least in an anagogical sense.

¹⁴³ In Christian parlance, Mary is Mother of the Word. This calls to mind the Qur'anic phrase *umm al-kitab*, Mother of the Book. One finds the term *umm al-kitab* thrice in the Qur'an. Two of the *ayat* transparently understand the term in a personified sense, namely, *sura* 13:39: "God effaceth what He will, and establisheth, and with Him is the Mother of the Book"; and *sura* 43:4, cited above. The third instance, *sura* 3:7, specifies that the plain statements of the Qur'an, as opposed to the allegorical *ayat*, constitute the Mother of the Book. This can also be understood in the same basic sense found in the other two *ayat*, admittedly with a different nuance. The emphasis upon "plain," or "apparent," simply accentuates the "tendency" of the unmanifest matrix (*umm*) to project herself upon the level of "appearance," or of "manifestation" on the "visible" plane, this "appearance" being precisely the manifest *kitab*.

the ultimate “originative” role. As Eve had priority in the fall, so it is proper and fitting that Mary, the New Eve, have priority in the restoration. This priority is implied by the very fact that Mary is not the spouse, but the mother of what the patristic authors call the New Adam, Jesus. The beginning and origin of the restoration is from the New Eve, not the New Adam, though again, since there is no “competition” involved, one must avoid all artificial schematization in the contrastive paradigm at hand.

One could note, moreover, an important priority of Christ over the Mary in Islamic theology, for which Jesus is a *rasul*, a messenger or apostle, who delivers a divine law or founds a religion. By contrast, Mary is but a *nabiyyah*, a Prophetess who does not deliver a divine law or found a religion. According to a *hadith*, no woman has ever founded a religion. This is understandable, given that holy women of the highest order, and Mary is superlatively such according to Islamic doctrine, can be viewed as manifestations on the earthly plane of the celestial Lady Wisdom, or the *umm al-kitab*, that is, the Mother of the Book (which encompasses the *logos*). This is to say that Mary is a theophany of the formless matrix (*umm*), and in accord with her sophianic nature, it is not fitting that she establish a religion, which is “formalistic” by definition. The establishment of the latter is the task of the *kitab* (*logos*), Jesus in this context, who does not represent esoterism or inwardness as such (as does Mary), but rather esoteric wisdom, which is but a modality of the esoteric matrix.

This is one reason why Jesus is in a certain sense divine Wisdom only “indirectly.” Lady Wisdom, who is the mother of the Book, is Wisdom directly, and she gives birth to the Book, or *logos*. Jesus is Wisdom insofar as he issues forth from the mother who is Wisdom, so that he is *Filius Sapientiae*. Yet in virtue of his emergence from the divine Wisdom, who is his mother Mary, and especially given the additional fact that according to Christian and Islamic claims Jesus has no earthly father, Paul can speak of “Christ, the Wisdom of God,” not to mention that both *logos* and *sophia* participate essentially in the plenitude of Wisdom. The Word naturally participates in the nature of his mother, who is Wisdom.

Given this formless sophianic matrix which Jesus prolongs in his own person, it is understandable that the religion associated with his name, Christianity, has a tendency to reduce outward religious forms and commandments to a minimum.¹⁴⁴ One could, however, observe that for this comparison to be complete, the fact must be taken into account that although Mary is not a messenger, she is the mother of all messengers and is herself, according to Ruzbihan Baqli (a 12th-century CE Persian Sufi), the substance of sanctity, the very sanctity of the Prophetic messengers.

¹⁴⁴ In this spirit, Aquinas concludes in *Summa Theologiae* 2, 108, a.2: “The right use of grace is by means of works of charity. These, in so far as they are essential to virtue, pertain to the moral precepts, which also formed part of the Old Law. Hence, in this respect, the New Law had nothing to add as regards external action. The determination of these works in their relation to the divine worship, belongs to the ceremonial precepts of the Law; and, in relation to our neighbor, to the judicial precepts, as stated above (99, 4). And therefore, since these determinations are not in themselves necessarily connected with inward grace wherein the Law consists, they do not come under a precept of the New Law, but are left to the decision of man; some relating to inferiors—as when a precept is given to an individual; others, relating to superiors, temporal or spiritual, referring, namely, to the common good. Accordingly the New Law had no other external works to determine, by prescribing or forbidding, except the sacraments, and those moral precepts which have a necessary connection with virtue, for instance, that one must not kill, or steal, and so forth.”

Here we refer to *Summa Theologiae prima pars* 41 article 3 in order to set into their proper contexts the eternal and temporal dimensions of the Word and Wisdom of God in Christian thought:

Reply to Objection 4. When we say “Wisdom was created,” this may be understood not of Wisdom which is the son of God, but of created wisdom given by God to creatures: for it is said, “he created her [namely, Wisdom] in the Holy Ghost, and he poured her out over all his works” (Sirach 1:9-10). Nor is it inconsistent for scripture in one text to speak of the Wisdom begotten and wisdom created, for wisdom created is a kind of participation of the uncreated Wisdom. The saying may also be referred to the created nature assumed by the son, so that the sense be, “From the beginning and before the world was I made”—that is, I was foreseen as united to the creature.

In the second half of this particular passage, Aquinas subtly opens up an exegetical possibility for applying to what he holds as uncreated Wisdom various scriptural passages which speak of created Wisdom, for these verses can be interpreted as involving a proleptic view of the incarnation: “‘I was made’—that is, I was foreseen as united to the creature.” In the reply to Objection 4, Aquinas identifies Wisdom with the son; yet we again note that the name “Wisdom” most properly designates the Holy Spirit, for the reasons previously presented in the body of this essay.

Now if we allow the possibility, justified by a connotative interpretation of Aquinas' doctrine on the possibility of multiple *logos* incarnations, that the mother of Jesus was an incarnation of Wisdom, of the Holy Spirit, then we could conclude that the *Sedes Sapientiae*, Mary, in a certain sense possesses both an uncreated “divine” (or celestial) nature and a created human nature. And it is indeed suggestive that Sirach 24 proclaims that Lady Wisdom has both created and eternal aspects. Verse 9: “From eternity, in the beginning, he created me. . . .” Verse 18b reads in various Greek versions: “Being eternal, I am therefore given unto all my children, unto those who are named by him.” The two verses can of course be reconciled, for verse 9 already suggests that Wisdom’s creation is effected according to, or in, an “eternal” mode, a modality which verse 18b accentuates.

What Christian Trinitarian theology terms the son’s “eternal generation,” the Jewish scriptures might describe alternatively by use of the Semitically more concrete image and word “creation.” This in its own way reinforces the fact that the Father alone (*ho theos*) is neither begotten nor proceeds. As Jesus insisted: “Why call me good? none is good but God alone.” If Mary is an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, then the following paradigm would obtain: Just as there can be no simplistic, exhaustive identification between Jesus and the Word, so there could be no simplistic, exhaustive identification between Mary and Wisdom. To ignore the safeguards set in place by Aquinas’ doctrine on the multiplicity of *logos* incarnations, with its negation of the possibility of any created nature fully or exhaustively circumscribing the divine *logos*, would be to commit the sin, in Islamic theological language, of *shirk*, of “association” of the created with the Uncreated. Expressed in positive terminology: the created Mary as incarnation of preexistent Wisdom, that is, Mary’s created human nature, by virtue of the hypostatic union involving the

Wisdom of God, reveals to us the Face of God: “And whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God” (*Qur'an sura* 2:115).¹⁴⁵

We might better understand this model of the hypostatic union of Mary with the *Sedes Sapientiae* if we observe that she was, according to Christian doctrine, predestined in eternity to be the mother of the *logos*. Accordingly, at first her freedom and intentionality did not yet exist in temporality. Because she later received the *logos* directly into her person in time, when her freedom and intentionality existed on the earthly plane, her “intimacy” with the divine nature must therefore exceed the familiarity enjoyed by the faithful in general. Of the broader application, 2 Peter 1:4 writes, “that you might be made partakers of the divine nature.”¹⁴⁶

Given the infinite ontological distance between Mary’s created humanity and the preexistent *sophia*, we cannot understand the Lady Wisdom scriptural passages (Proverbs 8, Sirach 24) as denoting a hypostatic union of Mary and the Holy Spirit on the plane of Mary’s “preexistential existence.”¹⁴⁷ However, the Lady Wisdom passages may be said to connote a preexistential aspect of Marian hypostatic union with Wisdom. This is especially the case given the theological hypostatic implications of her title *Sedes Sapientiae*, as previously explicated. Moreover, when we integrate Aquinas’ teaching on the non-identity between the Word and the humanity of Jesus,¹⁴⁸ by analogy if there is a certain “indirectness” in the Marian incarnation of Wisdom, then an element of indirectness also applies in a certain sense to the Christic incarnation of the Word. This is because the Lady Wisdom scriptures cannot be directly applied, *mutatis mutandi*, to the created humanity of Jesus, though of course they can be made to apply indirectly to such, precisely in view of the eternal divine *consilium* regarding the “incarnation” of Word and Wisdom. In this context, one might bear in mind that Mary’s hypostatic union with Wisdom (the Holy Spirit) is not only the result of Mary’s own free intention in time, but also of the Will of God in eternity. We must also remark, for the sake of completeness, that to identify the beginning of Mary’s hypostatic union with the annunciation is by no means the only option at hand. As intimated above, from a Christian perspective, texts such as Sirach 24 could seem to suggest the possibility that Mary had been

¹⁴⁵ According to theological consensus concerning this *aya*, “the Face of God” denotes “the Essence of God.” Yet we must insist that the obvious outward symbolism of the face suggests that we have here a reference to the immanent divine Essence’s “tendency” to “overflow,” in the Plotinian sense, towards cosmic manifestation. If the inward Essence alone were denoted by “Face of God,” then the concreteness and visibility implied in the phrase “Whithersoever ye turn,” that is, “look,” would be unjustified and incongruent with the second half of the *aya*.

¹⁴⁶ Aquinas comments on this verse in *Summa Theologiae*, 3, 3, 4, ad 3: “An assumption which takes place by the grace of adoption is terminated in a certain participation of the Divine Nature, by an assimilation to Its goodness, according to 2 Pt. 1:4: ‘That you may be made partakers of the Divine Nature.’” (. . . *assumptio quae fit per gratiam adoptionis terminatur ad quandam participationem divinae naturae secundum assimilationem ad bonitatem illius*). This general participation in the divine order of which Aquinas writes is comparable to what we find referred to in the following *hadith* of Muhammad cited by Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq in section 74 of his *Lantern of the Path*: “The Holy Prophet said: ‘In the heart is a light . . . , a share of the Prophetic light, and it has been bestowed in the hearts of the believers.’”

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *Gospel of Thomas* logion 19: “Blessed is he who existed before he existed.”

¹⁴⁸ This does not contradict the simultaneous teaching which holds that what is predicated of the Logos must also be predicated of Jesus Christ.

hypostatically united with the Holy Spirit not only from the beginning of her life,¹⁴⁹ but even “preexistentially” in an analogical, symbolical sense to be sure.

In Aquinas’ *Expositio Salutationis angelicae* a 1 we read of Mary: “Without corruption she conceived, in solace she carried, and in joy she gave birth to the savior” (*quia sine corruptione concepit, in solatio portavit, et in gaudio peperit salvatorem*). Compare Aquinas’ triadic Marian statement with the twofold triadic proclamation in the early second-century CE Jewish-Christian *Odes of Solomon* 19:10-11:

- 10 She brought forth because of will,
and she brought forth because of declaration,
and she acquired because of abundant majesty,
- 11 and loved because of redemption,
and guarded because of kindness,
and declared because of grandeur.¹⁵⁰

Expositio Salutationis angelicae a 3 affirms, in accord with traditional Christian theology, the priority of Jesus over Mary: “Thus, therefore, the Virgin is blessed; but even more blessed is the fruit of her womb.” (*Sic ergo est virgo benedicta; sed et magis benedictus fructus eius*). Yet in article 1 of this same work, Aquinas presents several arguments which would seem to contain the esoteric seeds of a more “equivalent” Christic-Marian paradigm. Here we will translate three passages from article 1. The first passage implies that Mary was not merely a passive recipient of the divine grace, but that she actively effected, in union with the Holy Spirit, the conception of Christ. In what follows, one should bear in mind that according to traditional Catholic theology, “grace” is understood as the “divine nature” immanent in the human soul:

[B]ut the Blessed Virgin’s soul was so full [of grace] that therefrom grace overflowed into her flesh, so that she might therefrom conceive the son of God. And therefore does Hugh of St. Victor say: “Because in her heart the love of the Holy Spirit singularly burned, on account of this, she worked miracles in her flesh, for therefrom was born God and man.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ The question of whether this “beginning” would refer to her conception or to her birth is beyond the scope of the present essay. We note only that in Catholic theology it is not heretical to hold that Mary was purified from sin at the “instant” of her ensoulment, which is considered the “beginning” of her life. Thus when Aquinas holds that Mary was touched by original sin before her ensoulment, this is a perfectly valid theological option in current Catholic dogma. This involves the traditional belief that the embryo exists for a certain period of time before actual ensoulment. To hold that Mary was never touched by original sin is also a legitimate position for a Catholic. For the sake of completeness we should note that the concept of original sin is formally absent in Judaism, Jewish Christianity, and Islam.

¹⁵⁰ Translation from the Syriac by Samuel Zinner. It is perhaps significant that this Marian ode is presented in the name of Solomon. Whereas on the one hand the title *Sedes Sapientiae* refers to Lady Wisdom’s throne mentioned in Sirach 24, on the other hand many ecclesiastical writers associate the *Sedes Sapientiae* with the throne of Solomon.

¹⁵¹ [*Sed anima beatae virginis ita fuit plena quod ex ea refudit gratiam in carnem, ut de ipsa conciperet filium Dei. Et ideo dicit Hugo de s. Victore: quia in corde eius amor spiritus sancti*

In the second passage, there is proposed a certain equivalence between Jesus and Mary in the order of salvation, and this is fitting, given that Mary cannot be, in every respect, sub-ordinate to Jesus, on account of her status as mother, and not spouse, of the new Adam, a position which in certain respects implies not only equality but also even an element of priority:

[B]ut if one possessed so much [grace] so as to suffice unto the salvation of all men of the world, this would be the maximum: and this is in Christ, and in the Blessed Virgin. . .

Sirach 24:25 says of her, “In me is all hope of life and of virtue.” She is therefore full of grace, and exceeds angels in the plenitude of grace; and on account of this is she fittingly called Mary, which being interpreted is, “the one illuminated within herself”; and so Isaiah 58:11, ‘With splendors shall he fill thy soul’; and the illuminatrix in others, as much as even unto the entire world; and for this reason is she assimilated (compared) to the sun and moon.¹⁵²

In the third, and perhaps most extraordinary passage, Aquinas establishes that both Jesus and Mary are rightly called “the lord.” The orthographic divergence between the English words “lord” and “lady” does not effectively convey the flavor of equivalence contained in the Latin terms *Dominus* and *Domina*. In order to better reproduce the sense of the Latin, we avoid the English word “lady” in what follows:

Lk. 1:35, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee.” Thus, therefore, more intimate with God is the Blessed Virgin than an angel is. . . [It] is sung of her: “Of the totality of the Trinity the noble *trinclinum*.” . . . She is mother of the Lord, and for this reason she is the Lord (*domina*). And so this name “Mary” befits her, which in the Syriac language is interpreted, “the Lord.”¹⁵³

That Mary is the *trinclinum*, or resting place, of the Trinity, recalls her title *Sedes Sapientiae*, that is, her human nature is the resting place, or throne, of the preexistent divine Lady Wisdom. Lastly, by “Syriac,” Aquinas probably means Aramaic. The angelic doctor thus assimilates to the name “Mary” the ancient Christian Aramaic divine title, “mar,” “lord” (= Greek

singulariter ardebat, ideo in carne eius mirabilia faciebat, intantum quod de ea nasceretur Deus et homo.

¹⁵² *[S]ed quando haberet tantum quod sufficeret ad salutem omnium hominum de mundo, hoc esset maximum: et hoc est in Christo, et in beata virgine. . . Eccli. XXIV, 25: in me omnis spes vitae et virtutis. Sic ergo plena est gratia, et excedit Angelos in plenitudine gratiae; et propter hoc convenienter vocatur Maria quae interpretatur illuminata in se; unde Isai. LVIII, 11: implebit splendoribus animam tuam; et illuminatrix in alios, quantum ad totum mundum; et ideo assimilatur soli et lunae.*

¹⁵³ *Luc. I, 35: spiritus sanctus superveniet in te. Sic ergo familiarior cum Deo est beata virgo quam Angelus. . . Et . . . cantatur de ea: totius Trinitatis nobile triclinium. . . mater domini, et ideo domina est. Unde convenit ei hoc nomen Maria, quod Syra lingua interpretatur domina.*

kyrios) which is contained in the Jewish-Christian liturgical acclamation recorded by Paul, namely, “Maranatha!”¹⁵⁴ If Aquinas refers to Syriac, then he could have in mind *marya*.

We here cite *Summa theologiae*, 1a. 25, 6 ad 4, where Aquinas ascribes to Mary the qualities of divine infinity, dignity, and goodness. The same attributes are assigned not only to the humanity of Jesus, but also to created happiness. This triadic paradigm would seem to suggest connotatively not only an aspect of a certain of non-delimitation in Jesus and Mary in their humanity, but also in creation in general. This is justified, from one angle, by the fact that the finite emerges from, and participates in, the divine infinitude:

The humanity of Christ, from the fact that it is united to the Godhead; and created happiness from the fact that it is the fruition of God; and the Blessed Virgin from the fact that she is the mother of God; have all a certain infinite dignity from the infinite good, which is God. And on this account there cannot be anything better than these; just as there cannot be anything better than God.¹⁵⁵

Aquinas’ teaching on the possibility of a multiplicity of *logos* incarnations is consonant with what the Church considers sacred scripture. In his *Sententiarum lib.* 3 d. 1 q. 2 a. 5 s. c. 2, Thomas refers to the Wisdom of Solomon in order to illustrate how the unity of a divine Person is not incompatible with the assumption of a multiplicity of human natures. Wisdom 7:27: “And being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself the same, she reneweth all things, and through nations conveyeth herself into holy souls, she maketh friends of God and prophets.”¹⁵⁶ Sirach 50, as we have noted before, portrays Simon the high priest as a manifestation of the divine personified Wisdom on the earthly plane. One might also consider once again Hebrews 1:1-2: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers in the prophets, last of all, in

¹⁵⁴ It is possible that primitive Aramaic-speaking Christianity in Jerusalem (and elsewhere) discerned an allusion to the name Mary in the title Mar, “Lord.” That Mary is contained implicity in the proclamation that “Yeshua is Lord (Mar)” might naturally have inspired the Jewish Christians to see in Mary an “incarnation” of the Holy Spirit, paralleling Jesus as incarnation of the Logos. This could explain the assimilation of Mary to the Holy Spirit in the ancient *Gospel of the Hebrews*, in which Jesus uses the phrase, “my Mother, the Holy Spirit.” Thus the beginnings of a “higher” Mariology might not be situated in medieval Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, but in ancient Aramaic Christianity. One could furthermore note that the primitive concept of the preexistent Lady Ecclesia, found already in the *Shepherd of Hermas* and *2 Clement*, could hardly have failed to remind early Christians of Mary. Regardless of all exegetical debates, the same can be said of Revelation 12:1’s figure of the queen of heaven. Lastly, the early second-century CE Syriac *Odes of Solomon* 19 presents the Mary and the Holy Spirit in a manner which makes it difficult to distinguish which verses apply to whom.

¹⁵⁵ Recall the thesis of Matthias Scheeben, perhaps the greatest German Catholic theologian of the 19th century, according to which the union between Christ and believers is nothing other than a prolongation of the hypostatic union of the eternal Logos with Jesus Christ.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Sententiarum lib.* 3 d. 1 q. 2 a. 5 s. c. 2: Praeterea, majoris bonitatis et dignitatis ostensiva est unio qua filius Dei humanam naturam in unitatem personae assumpsit, quam illa qua mentem hominis per gratiam sibi unit. Sed haec secunda unio quae est per gratiam, non est filii ad unum tantum, sed ad multos, quia sapientia in animas sanctas se transfert; Sap. 7. Cum ergo bonum sit diffusivum et communicativum, videtur quod illa unio quae est in unitate personae, possit esse in persona filii ad multas humanas naturas.

these days hath spoken to us in a son.” God’s speech is the *logos*; God manifested the *logos* repeatedly throughout sacred history. This scriptural passage seems to suggest indirectly that Jesus and the previous Prophets were “incarnations” or theophanies of the same *logos*.

These modes of manifestation of the *logos* certainly involved ontological variation and differentiation, but in Christian doctrine the Prophets and Jesus were all mutual manifestations of the same divine *logos*. Such a “graduated” manifestation of the single *logos* in multiple modalities is also suggested by John 1:17: “For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” The same Word that had been revealed in the modality of law “in times past” by the Prophet Moses, was later revealed in the modality of grace and truth by Jesus.

The Prophet of Islam conforms to an Abrahamic paradigm of multiplicity of *logos*-theophany: “He hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the scripture with truth, confirming that which was (revealed) before it, even as he revealed the Torah and the Gospel afore-time, for a guidance to mankind . . .” (*Qur'an sura 3:3-4*). The mention of Muhammad once again “complicates” the theological paradigm from a Christian viewpoint.

In order to prepare to bring this chapter to at least a provisional conclusion, perhaps it might be helpful to explore another passage from Aquinas, in which the angelic doctor specifies that the new law, which will endure till the end of the world, is primarily an inward reality, and only secondarily outward:

Summa Theologiae i-ii q. 106 a. 1 s. c. On the contrary, the new law is the law of the new testament. But the law of the new testament is instilled in our hearts. For the apostle, quoting the authority of Jeremias 31:31, 33: “Behold the days shall come, saith the Lord; and I will perfect unto the house of Israel, and unto the house of Judah, a new testament,” says, explaining what this statement is (*Hebrews 8:8, 10*): “For this is the testament which I will make to the house of Israel . . . by giving my laws into their mind, and in their heart will I write them.” Therefore the new law is instilled in our hearts.

Summa Theologiae i-ii q. 106 a. 1 co. I answer that, “Each thing appears to be that which preponderates in it,” as the Philosopher states (*Ethic. ix, 8*). Now that which is preponderant in the law of the new testament, and whereon all its efficacy is based, is the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is given through faith in Christ. Consequently the new law is chiefly the grace itself of the Holy Ghost, which is given to those who believe in Christ. This is manifestly stated by the apostle who says (*Romans 3:27*): “Where is . . . thy boasting? it is excluded. By what law? Of works? no, but by the law of faith”: for he calls the grace itself of faith “a law.” And still more clearly it is written (*Romans 8:2*): “The law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath delivered me from the law of sin and of death.” Hence Augustine says (*De Spir. et Lit. xxiv*) that “as the law of deeds was written on tables of stone, so is the law of faith inscribed on the hearts of the faithful”: And elsewhere, in the same book (xxi): “What else are the divine laws written by God himself on our hearts, but the very presence of his Holy Spirit?” Nevertheless the new law contains certain things that dispose us to receive the grace of the Holy Ghost, and pertaining to the use of that grace: Such things are of secondary importance, so to speak, in the new law; and the faithful need to be instructed concerning them, both by word and writing, both as to what they should believe and as to

what they should do. Consequently we must say that the new law is in the first place a law that is inscribed on our hearts, but that secondarily it is a written law.

In essence, the “new law” is not to be identified with any religion considered solely on the outward plane, but with the inward presence of the divine spirit in the hearts of the faithful. Insofar as the new law is inward it can be associated with the “primordial” religion, that is the inward religion (or the inward essence of religion as such). According to Islamic theology, this manifests itself throughout history on the mundane plane as the various heavenly revelations. Now this thesis, that the primordial religion, or the inward dimension of religion, has existed from the beginning of the world, does not necessarily contradict Aquinas’ assertion in *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 106 a. 3 s. c.: “I answer that . . . it was not fitting for the new law to be given from the beginning of the world.” Yet although the inward law was not then “given,” this does not necessitate that it did not yet in itself exist, and its existence as such or *per se* would seem to be implied by Aquinas when he continues in *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 106 a. 3 ad 2: “The state of mankind does not vary according to diversity of place, but according to succession of time. Hence the new law avails for all places, but not for all times: although at all times there have been some persons belonging to the new testament, as stated above (1, ad 3).”

Now the question of the possibility of the Islamic revelation’s authenticity from a Thomistic perspective would seem to be precluded by his affirmation that the new law will last till the end of the world, a topic he deals with in *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 106 a. 4. On the other hand, if the new law has existed implicity as (inward) primordial religion from the beginning of the world, not only would it be logical that it would endure till the same world’s end, as Aquinas maintains, but this would also allow us to clarify that the new law, as implicate primordial religion, cannot be restrictively and exhaustively identified with the Christian religion on the outward, historical or “sociological” plane. We allude to the very real distinction between the Church as the mystical Body of Christ and the historical phenomenon of “Christianity,” the latter term never appearing once in the New Testament. This clarification would then open up the possibility that a further “renewal” of heavenly revelation after Christianity (apart from the question of the possibility or fittingness of such) would not mean that the new law as such does not last till the end of the world. In any event, and be that as it may, Aquinas maintains that the new law will pass away only in heaven, in eternity. After all, in the beatific vision there is no longer any need for “religion,” which etymologically implies a means of “binding” or uniting humanity to God.

In *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 106 a. 4 ad 2, Aquinas maintains that John 16:13 was fulfilled at Pentecost, so that the Paraclete’s coming can have nothing to do with the appearance or arrival of any future Prophet. That to a certain degree Pentecost fulfills the promise of the Paraclete’s coming cannot be denied in Christian theology. However, a careful reading of John 16 reveals that Jesus’ promises in this regard are polyvalent and simultaneously imply multiple levels of fulfillment. Thus the promise of the Paraclete’s coming also seems to coincide with Jesus’ eschatological *parousia*,¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ See John 14:3, 18-19, 22; 15:26; 16:16-19. These verses presuppose a realized eschatology which “collapses” the *parousia* not only with Pentecost, but also with the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. See in the present monograph the chapter, “The Christic and Marian Dimensions of the Good Friday Singularity Paradigm.”

and the spirit-Paraclete even coincides with Jesus in some sense.¹⁵⁸

Aquinas is correct when he writes that Jesus' promise of the Paraclete to teach all truth was fulfilled in the historical mission of the twelve apostles: "Now the Holy Ghost taught the apostles all truth in respect of matters necessary for salvation; those things, to wit, that we are bound to believe and to do." This is certainly a fulfillment of Jesus' promise in John 16. However, given the polyvalent dimension of John chapters 14-16 it seems that there must also be an eschatological applicability to the Paraclete's teaching, and it is precisely this polyvalent opening toward the eschatological which, from an Islamic perspective, allows one to see in Muhammad the possibility of a Paracletic function, although this cannot be reconciled in any direct sense with the Thomistic perspective.

Our basic line of argumentation, namely, that Jesus' prophecy of the Paraclete's coming possesses multiple layers of fulfillment, including but not restricted to Pentecost, may be supported by the example of Jesus' prophecy regarding the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple under Vespasian in 70 CE. This prophecy speaks of this historical event as if it were the eschatological end of the world. The most natural theological interpretation of this fact is that prophecy in general implies and encompasses multiple levels of historical fulfillment. The conclusion for our present purposes is that just as Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE also has a fulfillment at the end of the world, so Jesus' prophecy of the Paraclete's coming at Pentecost can have a further and later historical fulfillment in a Paracletic Prophet such as Muhammad. It will of course be up to Christian authorities to determine if such a model is allowable in a Christian doctrinal framework.

It will be helpful in this context to revisit our earlier point regarding the lack of a claim within Islam to being an essentially different religion apart from either Judaism or Christianity. It is noteworthy that the Qur'anic *aya* (61:6) which sees in Muhammad a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy concerning the Paraclete's coming indeed emphasizes the continuity, not discontinuity, between the three variants of the Abrahamic covenant, namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: "And when Jesus son of Mary said: O Children of Israel! I am a messenger of God unto you, confirming that which was (revealed) before me in the Torah, and bring good tidings of a messenger who cometh after me, whose name is the Praised One (Ahmad)."

Rather than giving out our own words, we wish to continue by citing a few verses from various sacred scriptures. We will first quote *sura* 5:48: "For each [nation] We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way [= religion]. Had God willed he could have made you one community. . . . Unto God ye will all return, and he will then inform you of that wherein ye differ." Christians might consider the words of Paul, from 1 Corinthians 4:5: "Therefore, judge not before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of hearts; and then shall every man have praise from God."

The burden of this chapter has not been to convince Christians and Muslims to accept each other's religions in any syncretistic way. Instead, a more realistic goal is to throw light on what may be various degrees of overlap between the two faiths, which may lead to tolerance and then to genuine respect for each other as "other."

¹⁵⁸ 1 John 2:1 explicitly calls Jesus the Paraclete. 2 Corinthians 3:17 says of Jesus: "Now the Lord is the Spirit."

To conclude, we will recall that various traditional Jewish authorities hold that while Judaism cannot accept many core Christian or Islamic claims, nevertheless, these religions may be viewed as providential insofar as they have spread knowledge of monotheism to the nations. They have also created an expectation for the final messianic era promised in the Tanakh.

11. Reflections on Christian Missionary Activity

Colossians 1:19-20, 23

19 For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell,
20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making
peace by the blood of his cross.
23 . . . this is the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under
heaven. . . .

The Christian scriptures record Jesus' mandate to the apostles to preach to "all nations" (Matthew 28; Luke 24), to "all the world" (Mark 16; but this is a later interpolation to the text). According to Luke 24:47 "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations." In Acts 1:4 Jesus exhorts the disciples: "Do not leave Jerusalem," but then informs them in verse 8 that "you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth." Jesus, according to these canonical accounts, sent his disciples to all nations, to all the world. Deutero-Paul, reflecting a relatively late date in the history of the early Church, interestingly proclaims in Colossians 1:23 that "the gospel has been preached," past tense, "to every creature under heaven." The past tense is strengthened especially by the past tense employed earlier in verses 19-20, which even more forcefully declares that every entity, every being, meaning everything that exists in heaven and earth, has been reconciled to God. The past tense clearly denotes an accomplished fact.

The absoluteness of the statement that in effect the entire cosmos presently stands reconciled to God should at the very least give missionaries motivation to pause and reflect. Theologians have formulated theories that in effect water down and effectively empty the Colossians passage of much of its obvious force. The most popular of these interpretations speaks of an objective and a subjective salvation, a distinction which in itself cannot be assailed from a Christian theological perspective. But in the final analysis, if the cosmos is not saved both objectively and subjectively—at least *sub specie aeternitatis*—then Deutero-Paul's statement would seem to be ultimately either meaningless or something akin to mere emotional-based hyperbole.

Before explicating the problem further, let us first elucidate precisely what, according to Jesus' statements, the content of the disciples' teaching to the nations was to be. Matthew 28 speaks of teaching all nations what Jesus taught the disciples, and of "baptizing" the nations "in the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Spirit." Mark 16:15, admittedly a later interpolation, speaks of "preaching the gospel," or "good news." Luke 24:47 mentions "repentance and forgiveness" being preached, or announced, to all nations "in his name." Acts simply has Jesus saying that the disciples "will be witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth."

The content of the so-called "Great Commission" is a transmission of the teaching of Jesus, and not, note well, of the doctrines of the Church about Christ. Furthermore, this teaching of Jesus includes the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness, which is of course the original preaching of Jesus when he began his ministry: "Repent and believe the good news, for the kingdom of God is here."

Lastly, this proclamation of Jesus' teaching is to be delivered by his disciples "in the name" of Jesus (Luke 24:47), or equivalently, "in the name of the Father, and of the son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28). The phrase "in the name of" does not refer principally to the ritual formula spoken at the ceremony of baptism. "In the name of" is an ancient legal phrase meaning "by the authority of," functionally equivalent to the modern legal concept of the power of attorney. The disciples are the legally authorized representatives of Jesus, and the divine authority is plainly transferred from Jesus to the apostles in the accounts of the Great Commission.

Before returning to the question of the cosmic reconciliation as accomplished fact, we should note that the phrases "in the name of" Jesus (Luke 24) and "in the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28) are functionally equivalent terms. Jesus always claimed to act in the name of (i.e., by the authority of) God. In Matthew 28, Jesus does not command the disciples to go into all the world and spread doctrines about the Trinity. That is no doubt a legitimate subject for the Church to explore for her own self-enlightenment, and for questions of intellection in itself. However, it is not, at least according to Jesus, to be the content of her preaching to the nations. Matthew 28's statement clearly stipulates the content of the kerygma to be the kerygma *of Jesus*, not *about Jesus*, strictly speaking. Compare this to what unfolded in the early Church, namely, the two were combined and merged. The latter soon overshadowed the former. Theological speculation about the divine Essence, the nature of Jesus, etc., certainly may enrich theological insights within the Church, and these rightly belong to the domain of the Church's teaching. But what the Church preaches must ultimately coincide with the preaching of Jesus which he willed to be proclaimed to the nations, and this kerygma is contained above all in Matthew 22:36-40:

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

38 This is the great and first commandment.

39 And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

40 On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."

The same teaching is contained in a briefer form in Matthew 7:12: "All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law and the prophets." This kerygma is precisely a teaching that Christians, Jews, and Muslims can agree upon, at least in the realm of praxis.

Christian theological speculations on the divine Essence and the nature of Jesus are somewhat functionally (although simultaneously in many respects theoretically impossibly) equivalent to various streams of theosophical thought encountered in authentic Jewish Kabbalism, Sufism, and Shi'ite gnosis. In Judaism and Islam, one is never forced to accept the esoteric doctrines of mystical initiates or gnostics. That is, the metaphysical doctrines are never part of the public proclamation imposed upon the average faithful or upon converts. The Church is the only Abrahamic religious variant that has taken such a path, and though some positive trajectories have historically arisen therefrom, the results of such a position have proven to be largely divisive.

In the beginning of Christian history, the only disagreement between the Church and Judaism was whether or not Jesus was the promised messiah. There was no disagreement about

doctrines of Trinity or Christology, for both groups of apostles and their fellow Jews held the same monotheistic faith. When Peter preached to the pious Jews on Pentecost, he spoke of the necessity of recognizing the messiahship of Jesus. For Peter this was in no sense a requirement to leave Judaism. Peter spoke of converting to God, not to a new religion. In any event, one should “convert” to God, not to a religion. To “convert” to anything other than God would be essentially a form of idolatry. All the apostles lived and died as faithful Torah-observant Jews. According to the Acts they continued to attend Temple services, and to offer the Mosaic sacrifices for sin. Accepting Jesus as the messiah had for them nothing to do with apostasy from Judaism.

One must realize that Peter on Pentecost preached only to Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Jewish feast in question. These Jews, according to Acts, had gathered together “from all nations of the world.” The Jews who were immersed (“baptized”) after Peter’s preaching did so as an act of entrance to the Jesus group. This was no more an apostasy from Judaism than was being immersed into the Essene sect or joining the Pharisees.

The fact is that Judaism never required pagans to “convert” to the religion of Judaism in order to be saved or to avoid hell. On the contrary, Judaism has always held that pagans will be saved as long as they strive to live according to the natural law of conscience as embodied in the Noachide laws, which Judaism sees as God’s salvific covenant with the nations. This covenant which exists side by side along with the Mosaic covenant for Israel. The so-called “converts” or “proselytes” to Judaism from among the pagans were Gentiles who wanted to be circumcised in order to become full Jews, or “friends of the Jews” by adopting the entirety of the Jewish Torah requirements. This “conversion” was not required by Judaism for the salvation of non-Jews. These represented exceptional cases that were allowed, but never required in Judaism.

Is it not an irony for the Church to claim that it universalized salvation, whereas Judaism reputedly restricted God’s favor to only the Hebrews (a claim found neither in the Jewish scriptures nor in Judaism at any period ancient or modern)? Judaism assured salvation to the nations as long as they followed the natural law of conscience, whereas the Church dogmatically restricted this universalism by largely confining salvation to its own religious system. To be sure there are in Christianity certain esoteric openings toward universalism, such as the conciliar condemnation of the proposition that there can be no grace operative outside the visible boundaries of the Church. The apostolic council (see Acts 15) upheld the traditional Jewish law that pagans need not be circumcised. They need only observe the Noachide laws against sexual impurity, murder, and the like.

When Peter, according to Galatians 2, ate with Gentiles, he broke no existing Jewish purity law. Judaism never forbade Jews eating with pagans, as long as the Jew consumed no food forbidden by the Torah. The reason Peter once refused to eat with pagans was that he on that occasion suspected that the food he was being served was not kosher. Peter was not requiring pagans to adopt Jewish food laws; he was only requiring what Paul himself had agreed to at the apostolic council, namely that the Torah must remain in effect for Jews (and for Jewish Christians), whereas pagans (including Gentile Christians), in accord with perennial Jewish legislation, need only observe the Noachide laws.

Given the Great Commission accounts that speak of a mission to the Gentiles, how are we to explain the fact that Peter in Acts 10 is completely unaware of any mission in the Church to preach to the nations? Obviously Jesus never demanded “conversions” of pagans to Judaism, for Judaism never demanded such. There is not a shred of evidence for such a demand on Jesus’ part in any

canonical or apocryphal (esoteric) gospel. As a faithful Jew, Jesus would have demanded only repentance to God and the praxis of morality from pagans. From this we may conclude that when in the Great Commission Jesus told the apostles to preach to all the nations, insofar as the demand applies to pagans, it was not a demand to “convert” to any religion, be that Judaism or Christianity. Moreover, the phrase “all nations” refers on one level at least to Jews of all nations. Peter’s example in Acts’ Pentecost narrative supports this contention, for it is specified that he preached to Jews “from every nation under heaven.” But as we have already observed, for Peter (as well as for Christ) this involved the recognition of Jesus as messiah, and not an abandonment of Judaism in any sense.

According to Acts, at one point Paul gave up his mission to the Jews and turned to the Gentiles. For Deutero-Paul then to make the statement in Colossians that the gospel has already been preached to every creature under heaven (phraseology reminiscent of Acts’ phrase: “Jews from every nation under heaven”) would mean that he considered the gospel to have been preached, past tense, an accomplished fact, to Jews of all nations, and to every creature under heaven.

This brings us to the crux of the matter: What precisely do the phrases “all nations” and “all the world” mean in the context of the Great Commission? The phrases mean essentially the entirety of the Roman Empire, or the “world” of Rome, and Acts would seem to support this interpretation. It is not hyperbole when Paul says the Roman Christians’ faith “is spoken of throughout the entire world” (Romans 1:8), because for Paul “the whole world” has limited parameters, namely, those of the Roman Empire, and of those nations who were in various forms of contact with the empire. This sheds light on the non-exhaustive yet exclusive claim in Acts 4:12: “And there is no other name given among humanity whereby we must be saved.” “Under heaven,” in light of Acts 2 and other passages cited above, might refer to the Roman Empire and to those nations in contact with it.

That the original Jewish-Christian form of Christianity was eventually excluded by the Great Church and that many parallels to the former survived largely in Islam, so that Christianity as a whole has historically emerged as a Greco-Roman entity in thought and ritual, is certainly significant when we integrate the above interpretation limiting “the world” to the Roman Empire and its trading partners.

None of this is to deny the truly universal (that is, international) significance of Jesus or of “Christianity.” While rejecting Christianity and Islam, Maimonides nevertheless considered their emergence as providential in that they spread monotheistic and eschatological messianic expectations to the nations. The Qur'an states that Mary and Jesus constitute a dual sign to all the worlds, to the entire cosmos. Yet this statement, as well as the Qur'anic proclamation of the universality of Muhammad's mission of mercy to all creatures, must also imply certain limitations which religious authorities might call providential.

That Islam has retained its specifically Arabic character wherever it has spread, parallels the retention of the essential Greco-Roman constitution of historical Christianity in both the east and west. The spread of Islam stopped at Europe's doors. Similarly, the Church has made no paradigm-changing inroads into Islamic nations or cultures. The age of mass conversion of nations to this or that particular faith seems to have passed for now with the respective flowerings of the Church and Islam. Without speculating about future possibilities, the Church would seem to have evangelized the world it was able to evangelize. Similarly, Islam would seem to have spread to the world attainable by it.

The various advances of Christianity into some of the Far Eastern cultures are in many respects not a sign of an “absolute” universality of the Greco-Roman church. They are instead essentially a sign of the traditional open-minded and tolerant attitudes of Far Eastern peoples. This is not to idealize these peoples or their ideas, nor to demonize the Church. All social collectivities are composed of human beings and thus are afflicted with various prejudices on the mundane plane. The fact remains, however, that the Church “co-exists” alongside such cultures in the particular lands under discussion, and the Church has not transformed, let alone replaced, their native cultures, be they Far Eastern or Islamic or Arabic. In this we see again the relativity and the limitations of the “universalizing” of the Church and her “cosmic” mission. The same limitative point might be made with reference to the current growing presence of Islam in the west.

In the Jewish scriptures, the Zoroastrian king Cyrus the Great is portrayed not only as foreshadowing the messiah, but he is actually called God’s messiah. This implies that Zoroastrians have their own salvific covenant with God, being included in the Noachide covenant for the nations. The Qur'an teaches that every nation has its own messenger and its own religion. That the exclusivity of the Church in the Christian scriptures is not of an exhaustive nature is demonstrated by the references to the assurance of salvation to the nations who have nothing but the observance of the natural law of conscience. We could also mention the absence of a single line in the “New Testament” regarding Jesus or the apostles demanding a “conversion” either to Judaism or to the Christian religion. For the New Testament, in continuity with the Hebrew scriptures, the “world” is composed of two “religions,” or better, “covenants,” namely, Judaism and the Noachide covenant. The Tanakh and the New Testament criticize only those among the nations who do not follow the Noachide laws, that is, the natural law of conscience.

The light of the Gospel is the good news not about theological speculations concerning the nature of the divine Essence or of Jesus’ ontological status. It is the light of Jesus’ teaching which is summed up in the commandment to love God and one’s neighbor.

According to the Qur'an, submission to God (Islam in its primordial sense) is “beyond all religion.” In the M. A. S. Abdel Haleem translation of *sura* 48:28, the addition of the word “other” in brackets is an intrusion into the Arabic text which would appear to change the meaning significantly: “It was he who sent his messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to show that it is above every [other] religion.” Would not the phrase “every [other] religion” here be better understood and rendered as “all religion”? The difference is marked. Truth as such transcends all religion in general, and all religions in particular. The same bracketed insertion occurs in *sura* 61:9 of the Haleem version, where the identical phrase from *sura* 48:28 is repeated.

Islam is essentially submission to God, and only at a secondary level is it a particular religion on the historical plane. Submission to God is the essential element present in and transcending all religions, or religion in general. Qur'an *sura* 2:136 states there is no distinction made between the Prophets, which would apply to the various religions founded by them as well. Haleem himself writes on p. xxiv with reference to Dawood's translation of Qur'an *sura* 3:85, “He that chooses a religion other than *islam*, it will not be accepted of him . . .,” that “those who read this word *islam* in the sense of the religion of the Prophet Muhammad will set up a barrier, illegitimately based on this verse, between *islam* and other monotheistic religions.” Islam in the essential sense thus involves a manifestation on the historical plane of the primordial religion, which in turn has manifested itself, according to Muslim belief, in varying modes throughout history within the various revealed religions.

We will begin the conclusion to this essay by quoting Song of Solomon 2:7 (which is repeated in Song 3:5): “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, that ye awaken not, nor stir up love, until it please.” This contains the traditional Jewish response to Christianity with regard to messianic expectation. Whereas Christianity believes that the messiah foretold in the Hebrew scriptures has arrived, Judaism responds to the contrary by exhorting, “awaken not, nor stir up love, until it please.”

From a traditional Jewish perspective, the truth of Judaism is founded upon the plenary scope of the public revelation of God at Mount Sinai. This revelation was plenary in the sense that God publicly spoke to the entire nation of Israel, not excepting a single soul. Israel cannot therefore abandon the covenant of Sinai for any religion based on private or quasi-private revelation. The question of the truth or falsity of such revelations is in the larger context immaterial. Nor is the issue that the Jewish people supposedly believe they control God’s gift of revelation.¹⁵⁹ What is decisive is that the revelation at Mount Sinai was made publicly to the entire nation of Israel, without any exception.¹⁶⁰ God is entirely free to bestow the gift of revelation as God chooses, but the only known entirely public revelation of God remains that at Mount Sinai. Consequently, from a traditional Jewish perspective it matters not whether the resurrected Jesus once appeared to 500 or to 5,000 persons.¹⁶¹ Such a quasi-private scenario is of an entirely different category from the Mount Sinai revelation to 600,000 men and their families.

In view of the traditional Jewish belief, it is not surprising that the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (1948-2020) came into conflict with some religious authorities when he wrote in his 2002 book *The Dignity of Difference*: “God has spoken to mankind in many languages: through Judaism to the Jews, Christianity to Christians, Islam to Muslims.” He changed the wording as follows in the 2003 edition, from which we supply the larger context:

The radical transcendence of God in the Hebrew Bible means that the Infinite lies beyond our finite understanding. God communicates in human language, but there are dimensions of the divine that must forever elude us. As Jews we believe that God has made a covenant with a singular people, but that does not exclude the possibility of other peoples, cultures and faiths finding their own relationship with God within the shared frame of the Noahide laws.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Qur'an *sura* 57:29: “That the People of the Book may know that they have no control over aught of the favors of God, and that these gifts of grace are in the hands of God, and that he vouchsafeth them to whom he will; for God is of infinite bounty.”

¹⁶⁰ For this reason the beatitude in John 20:29 can be understood as a polemic against the public nature of the Sinai revelation: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

¹⁶¹ The allusion is to 1 Corinthians 15:6: “Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.” (From a Jewish perspective the problematic character of the situation is only compounded by the fact that we have no contemporary account/s of this event). For the same reason, Luke’s inclusion in his Pentecost story in Acts 2 of allusions to the Torah’s accounts of the revelation at Mount Sinai (which hint at the idea of a new *matan torah*) fail to achieve their goal as far as Judaism is concerned. In the end, even if one accepts the historicity of Acts 2, this is immaterial because the entire nation of Israel was not present to witness the events at that particular feast of Shavuot.

¹⁶² Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How To Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (Revised edition; London/New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 55.

Sacks ends the paragraph with the following: “*God is God of all humanity, but between Babel and the end of days no single faith is the faith of all humanity.* Such a narrative would lead us to respect the search for God in people of other faiths and reconcile the particularity of cultures with the universality of the human condition.”¹⁶³ The sentence in italics read in the earlier 2002 version: “*God is the God of all humanity, but no single faith is or should be the faith of all humanity.*”

From a theological viewpoint, Sacks’ revisions are entirely justified, for after all, how could Sacks prove the claim that God has spoken by means of other religions when the revelation at Mount Sinai is the only publicly verifiable one? However, does not the situation change when one views the matter through the prism of Jewish monism? From this viewpoint, there can be no speaker or revealer but God. As God explains in Deuteronomy 4:35: “Unto thee it [i.e., the revelation at Mount Sinai] was shown, that thou mightest know that the LORD, He is God; there is nothing else than Him.” This is reaffirmed in verse 39: “Know this day, and lay it to thy heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is nothing else.”

That only God exists, however, does not have as a consequence that Israel is free to abandon the Sinai covenant. On the contrary, the fact of verse 39’s monism is precisely the basis for Israel’s obligation to maintain allegiance to the Sinai covenant for as long as the heavens and the earth endures. Thus we read in verse 40:

And thou shalt keep His statutes, and His commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever.

Monism does not mean that no falsity or false religions exist in the universe. Monism instead implies that even truth is inseparable from untruth, with the result that even untruth contains a degree of truth.

Similarly, from a monistic perspective, all choices would be the choices of God. Nevertheless, this is not incompatible with the monistic God demanding humans to reject evil and choose the good, as in Deuteronomy 30:19:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, thou and thy seed.

In the end, Jewish mysticism cannot overrule Jewish theology. Each remains legitimate in their own respective domains. A society, for instance, must be governed by a legal code that recognizes the polarity of good and evil, not by individual-level truths of mysticism that can see beyond the duality of good and evil.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, despite (or better, precisely because of) their

¹⁶³ Ibid; italics in original.

¹⁶⁴ On this topic, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

universal and monistic statements, authentic Jewish mystics remain true to their Jewish way of life.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ The same situation holds in Islam. Despite their universalistic language, the Sufis Ibn al-‘Arabi and Rumi maintained their practice of Islam. This is usually overlooked or downplayed in popular Western books on mysticism and Sufism.

PART III

ISLAMIC THEOLOGICAL AND ESOTERIC TRAJECTORIES COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS

Overview of Part III

I introduce Part III with the chapter entitled “The Christic Aspects of Ascent and Descent,” which explores Qur’ān *sura al-Ma’idah* (“The Table”), and presents the themes of the ascent of Jesus (‘Isa) to heaven and the descent of the table of celestial bread which he bestows upon the world. The chapter “The Prophetic Essence of Mary in Qur’ānic Context” specifies the prophetic status of Mary (Maryam) as manifestation of the divine matrix of silence and peace (which can be correlated with mysticism and esotericism), which is a state that precedes the spoken word (which can be correlated with theology and dogma).

Part III explores Islamic understandings of Mary as a manifestation of the divine mercy, indicating a Marian presence behind the Qur’ān as a whole. Significantly, *sura 97 (al-Qadr)* contains a simultaneous dual hint at the descent of the Qur’ān on the night of *Qadr* and the descent of the *logos* to the world through Mary on the night of the nativity.

Part III also explores the topic of the *ahlul bayt* (integrating both Shi’ite and Sunnite views on the “household of the Prophet”) and surveys and critiques a rich variety of themes encountered in Shi’ite esoteric traditions. The chapter “The Light Verse: Esoteric Interpretations” reviews Shi’ite perspectives on sacred persons as earthly manifestations of celestial light. I include Jesus and Mary in my considerations and thus enlarge the paradigm, highlighting correspondences especially between Fatima and Mary as earthly manifestations of celestial Lady Wisdom and Mother of the Book. I present various allegorical interpretations of Qur’ānic *ayat* relating to the themes of light and Paradise pertaining to Fatima and ‘Ali as examples of legitimate spiritual or esoteric exegesis. “The Esoteric Kingdom of Prophecy and the House of Wisdom” interprets a famous *hadith* on ‘Ali as the gate of wisdom and presents aspects of ‘Ali reminiscent of Mary and Jesus. The essay also compares the Arabic traditions on the *afrad* with the “unitary” or “solitary ones” of the *Gospel of Thomas*. “The Ahlul Bayt and the Divine Names” gathers Shi’ite speculations on theosophical etymology.

The concluding essay, “*Sura Al-Kahf*: The story of *Al-Khidr* and Moses,” presents the relationship between exoteric and esoteric wisdom, emphasizing the feminine nature of esoteric wisdom with the examples of both Fatima and Mary, conceptually associating the Qur’ānic Mother of the Book with the Lady Wisdom of the Jewish scriptures. The feminine divine is the expression or manifestation of the divine mercy and compassion, and this theme I have sought to incorporate and explicate in my work based upon legitimate traditions in the various Abrahamic religions.

12. The Christic Aspects of Ascent and Descent in Qur'an *Sura al-Ma'idah* (The Table)

According to Qur'an *sura* 4:157-158, God took up Jesus to himself, and this was effected through the divine attributes of might and wisdom: “. . . Jesus son of Mary, God's messenger . . . they slew him not for certain. But God took him up unto himself. God was ever Mighty, Wise.” Through his celestial ascent, Jesus was confirmed to be the Perfect man, the Universal man, filling all the cosmos, permeating every atom of the world with his breath, as Rumi says of Jesus.¹⁶⁶

While Jesus is associated with the theme of ascent in *sura* 4, the next *sura*, *al-Ma'idah*, associates Jesus with the theme of descent. According to *sura* 5, God sent down a table to the world, a feast table of the food of heaven:

Qur'an *sura* 5:112-120:

112: When the disciples said: O Jesus, son of Mary! is thy Lord able to send down for us a table spread with food from heaven? He said: Observe your duty to God, if ye are true believers.

113: (They said:) We wish to eat thereof, that we may satisfy our hearts and know that thou hast spoken truth to us, and that thereof we may be witnesses.

114: Jesus, son of Mary, said: O God, our Lord! Send down for us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us, for the first of us and for the last of us, and a sign from thee. Give us sustenance, for thou art the Best of sustainers.

115: God said: Lo! I send it down for you. and whoso disbelieveth of you afterward, him surely will I punish with a punishment wherewith I have not punished any of (my) creatures.

116: And when God saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside God? he saith: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right. If I used to say it, then thou knewest it. Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in thy mind. Lo! thou, only thou, art the Knower of things hidden.

117: I spake unto them only that which thou commandedst me, (saying): Worship God, my Lord and your Lord. I was a witness of them while I dwelt among them, and when thou tookest me thou wast the Watcher over them. thou art Witness over all things.

118: If thou punish them, lo! they are thy slaves, and if thou forgive them (lo! they are thy slaves). Lo! thou, only thou, art the Mighty, the Wise.

¹⁶⁶ See Mir Valiuddin, *Love of God: A Sufic Approach* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Sufi Publishing Co., 1972), p. 73.

119: God saith: This is a day in which their truthfulness profiteth the truthful, for theirs are Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they are secure for ever, God taking pleasure in them and they in him. That is the great triumph.

120: Unto God belongeth the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is therein, and he is able to do all things. (Pickthall, modified)

Sura 5's table signifies the Prophet Jesus himself. Through this heavenly food of primordial submission, of Islam, which effects *fana* and *unio mystica*, the heavenly Gardens underneath which rivers flow are attained by the faithful. Those who partake of the heavenly food in faithfulness to God receive the greatest reward, the "great triumph," namely, the Gardens and rivers of Paradise. This is the opposite of the greatest punishment meted out to those who partake of the heavenly food in unfaithfulness and profanation. The divine punishment and reward in relation to this heavenly food are meted out by means of the same two divine attributes which effected the ascension of Jesus in *sura 4*, namely, the divine might and wisdom. And what is the food of heaven but Wisdom, the *umm al-kitab*? Wisdom is the Mother of the Book, the mother of the *logos* (denoted by *amr* in the *al-Qadr sura*). Jesus, the son of Wisdom, naturally participates in the divine Wisdom from which he emerges, for as divine messenger, the Jesus is a manifestation on the earthly plane of the *kitab*. The Book is a plenary "exposition" of the Word (*amr, kalima*), the Word of God which Jesus is, for Christ, son of Mary, is the Word and spirit of God, and is so in a unique sense, as Ibn al-'Arabi writes: "The seal of universal sanctity above which there is no other saint is Jesus."

Sura 5:114: "for the first of us and for the last of us." The phrase "first and last" refers at one level to the Prophets and their representatives (for instance, the imams or caliphs). We may therefore see here a reference to Adam and to Muhammad, including, by extension, the eschatological Mahdi. According to Islamic apologetics Jesus prophesied the coming of Ahmad, and Jesus will accompany the Mahdi in the last days in the renewal and purification of the world. According to tradition, Jesus and Muhammad will participate in the testing of the righteous and unrighteous in Jerusalem on the day of judgment. The Prophets and their representatives are sustained by God through the food which is the bread of heaven, the *umm al-kitab*, whose earthly manifestation encompasses Mary, and through her, Jesus. This is extended to Fatima, who in Muslim thought shares in the spirit both by virtue of her being a manifestation of the *umm al-kitab* and her status of daughter of the Prophet, who bears the name Ahmad, a heavenly title of the spirit (Paraclete) promised by Jesus.

Through the divine might and wisdom, Jesus descended to the world to nourish the world with his message, he being a divine messenger in Christian and Islamic belief. Through the same attributes of might and wisdom, Jesus ascended into heaven, and was taken up unto God. Yet his ascent is inseparable from his descent to the world. The descent of Jesus as the table of Wisdom results in the ascent of the faithful to the heavenly Garden and its flowing rivers, the great triumph. The Garden is a symbol of the *umm al-kitab* and of all her earthly manifestations (Fatima, Mary, Hagar, and so on). The image of the rivers of Paradise can function as a symbol of the divine gnosis. Thus the Qur'an also speaks of Paradise flowing with rivers of wine.

On one level wine represents the "intoxicating" gnosis of the *unio mystica*, which inspires those who are traditionally known as the "drunken Sufis," such as al-Hallaj, who in ecstasy proclaimed: "I am Reality!" This intoxication of identification, of the transcendence of the veil

constituted by the distinction inherent in “I and thou,” of the Beloved and Lover, is spoken of by Jesus in the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas*, *logion* 108: “Whoever drinks from my mouth, he will be even as I am, and I will become he; and what is hidden will be made manifest to him.” The *umm* is the Garden, the *kitab* is the Paradise river of gnosis.¹⁶⁷ The Garden of Wisdom and the rivers of gnosis, these together constitute the great triumph, for God is mighty, wise.

The ultimate origin of Christian and Islamic talk of the rivers of Paradise is Genesis 2 narrative of the Garden of Eden and the four rivers that emanate from Eden. Genesis 2:10 tells us these four rivers had a single source: “And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became four heads.” The river flowing out of Eden is such a prominent theme in the holy *Zohar* that an entire monograph has been written on the *Zohar* with the main title *A River Flows from Eden*.¹⁶⁸ The book’s author, Melila Hellner-Eshed, writes of Genesis 2:10’s role in the *Zohar*: “This verse, I suggest, is a zoharic code, encapsulating a conception of the dynamic structure of divinity and consciousness. The purpose of this code is to signify to the reader how to awaken the special consciousness that the *Zohar* seeks to generate.”¹⁶⁹

Hellner-Eshed explains the role of the Torah not only in the *Zohar*, but in Jewish esoterism in general:

In the unique poetics of the Jewish mystical tradition, the radiance of the sky and the light of the stars are seen as the light of the Torah. In this connection, mention should be made of another image drawing on the theme of the night sky: Contemplation of the canvas of the Torah scroll and its letters as forms through which the divine light illuminates and shines, flowing continuously throughout all existence, like the river issuing from Eden, from the most hidden point within the divine.¹⁷⁰

Torah study, which is always a passionate ritual act, makes the waters of the River of the Garden of Eden to flow. As Hellner-Eshed writes, this involves the symbolism of the male and female and their union with each other:

On the divine plane, the garden is the feminine aspect of the Godhead that receives into herself the male and female aspects of the divine above her. In terms of the sefirot, the garden is the tenth one (*Malkhut*, Matronita, Shekhinah, the partner of the blessed Holy One), nourished by the river of the masculine sefirot above her. The watering of the garden is, then, the erotic union between this grade with the male grades of the divine.¹⁷¹

The passionate ritual of Torah study thus returns one to the beginning, to Paradise. Of the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism is the beginning, and within the framework of Jewish mysticism

¹⁶⁷ A reversal of the symbology is also possible, given that according to traditions, Fatima is *sura* 109:1-3’s *al-kawthar* (*kausar*), the fountain of Paradise.

¹⁶⁸ Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar*. Translated from the Hebrew by Nathan Wolski (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

¹⁶⁹ Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁰ Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden*, p. 80.

¹⁷¹ Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden*, p. 234.

there is no need to travel beyond Judaism in order to attain the ends of spirituality. The end is the beginning, and from this beginning everything flows and everything returns to it.

13. The *Fatiha*, *Pater Noster*, and the *Shema Israel*

Al-Fatiha, the Opening, Qur'an Sura 1

1 In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2 Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds,
3 the Merciful, the Compassionate,
4 the King of the day of Judgment.
5 Thee we worship; in thee we seek refuge.
6 Guide us unto the straight way,
7 the way of those whom thou hast favored, against whom thou art not incensed, and who go not astray.

Pater Noster

1 Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name;
2 thy kingdom come,
3 thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
4 Give us this day our daily bread,
5 and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
6 And lead us not into temptation,
7 but deliver us from evil.

It is certainly noteworthy that the *Fatiha* and the *Pater Noster*, the principal Islamic and Christian daily prayers, are both sevenfold in structure. God as the Merciful and the Compassionate represents the plenitude of mercy and compassion, and thus God is the loving Lord of the worlds. This plenitude is reinforced by the *Fatiha*'s repetition of the divine names "the Merciful, the Compassionate," lest one conceive of God's nature as essentially wrathful on account of the divine title which then follows, namely, "King of the day of Judgment." It is precisely because of the divine plenitude of grace and mercy that one worships God by imploring his help. The divine assistance takes the form of the revelation to each soul of the straight way. The straight way, or narrow path, is shown to those favored by God. They experience no wrath and they are kept from straying from the divine path.

In Islam, the path, the way, is by emphasis submission to God. But this path possesses both exoteric and esoteric, or dogmatic and mystical dimensions. Dogma stresses the divine wrath associated with the eschatological day of judgment. Esoterism stresses the gracious and merciful nature of the judge. Esoterism mingles the two perspectives when it acknowledges the dogmatic doctrine of hell, but simultaneously affirms the temporary and purificatory nature and function of the Fire. According to Ibn al-'Arabi, in the end, all will be saved and return to God, for nothing but God, especially not hell, can be eternal and imperishable in the strict sense. By contrast, Judaism holds that those who are wicked beyond repair will be annihilated, and to us this seems more consonant with the divine attribute of Justice.

The Merciful, the Compassionate, the God of Islam is named the heavenly Father by the Prophet Jesus ('Isa). As insightful Islamic scholars, such as al-Ghazali, have recognized, the terms "son of God" and "God the Father" were used by Jesus with special divine permission. In the Bible both these terms are metaphorical, and used as such the terms therefore present no theological incompatibility with Islam. This, however, does not imply that Islam can adopt such terms, for they are meant for a different religious cosmos, namely, the Christian religious "solar system," to employ a metaphor based on Nicolas of Cusa's *De pace fidei*. The terms can even be used occasionally by Islamic Sufis, but never generally adopted in Islam. The reason is that their non-use in Islam serves as a permanent corrective to imbalances, or at least dangers of recurring disequilibria, in the Church. These imbalances, according to the Qur'an, could never be condoned by Jesus. In any event, in the final analysis, the title "Father in heaven" is a theologically precise equivalent of the Qur'anic divine names "the Merciful and the Compassionate."

"Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds" corresponds to "Our Father who art in heaven." Both refer to the transcendence of the divine One, the divine Essence. In the title "Lord of the worlds," worlds can be taken in both spatial and temporal senses. Spatial, as in the worlds called "heaven" and "earth" in the *Pater Noster*. Temporal, as in "this world and in the world to come," a formula used by Jesus, the Rabbis, and the Qur'an.

The day of judgment, as end of the temporal history of the world, has a triadic nature. First, from the point of view of realized eschatology, the day of judgment is now, especially in the encounter with the Creator one experiences in daily life and at the culmination we call death. Second, there is the eschatological judgment associated with Paradise and the Fire. Third, there is the judgment as *apokatastasis* when the Fire is cooled and Paradise is in a certain sense experienced as union with God rather than strictly as a reward considered apart from God.

"Hallowed be thy name." The name, the sacred Tetragrammaton, is sanctified in the coming of the kingdom of heaven upon earth. When the will of God is done upon earth, then the kingdom comes. According to the *Gospel of Thomas* logia 3 and 113, the kingdom of God is simultaneously within and outside of the believer, that is, it is both immanent and transcendent. The *Pater Noster*'s "earth" alludes to the "human," the "immanent" dimension of God's will and kingdom, while "heaven" pertains to the divine and transcendent aspect of God's will and kingdom.

"Thy will be done." In Islam, the doing of God's will is accomplished primarily through submission to the divine intention. In the Church, by contrast, the will of God is accomplished not only in submission to God, but above all by the bestowal of the "daily bread" of the Eucharist, which results in the forgiveness of sins: "and forgive us our trespasses."

That the "straight way" is one of mercy and forgiveness is reflected in the *Pater Noster*'s petition for forgiveness. Ultimately, the secret of the straight way is the *apokatastasis*, when all of creation (excepting the annihilated wicked) will be saved from wrath and never again stray from mercy.

The *Pater Noster* petition "Give us this day our daily bread" corresponds to the *Fatiha* phrase "the day of judgment." Therefore, this daily bread is both temporal and eschatological, and it is the Eucharistic Passover bread alluded to in *sura* 5, which bears the title "The Table Spread" (*al-Ma'idah*), verses 112-115:

112. When the disciples said: O Jesus, son of Mary! Is thy Lord able to send down for us a table spread with food from heaven? He said: Observe your duty to God, if ye are true believers.

113. (They said:) We wish to eat thereof, that we may satisfy our hearts and know that thou hast spoken truth to us, and that thereof we may be witnesses.

114. Jesus, son of Mary, said: O God, our Lord! Send down for us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us, for the first of us and for the last of us, and a sign from thee. Give us sustenance, for thou art the Best of sustainers.

115. God said: Lo! I send it down for you. and whoso disbelieveth of you afterward, him surely will I punish with a punishment wherewith I have not punished any of (my) creatures.

This bread is associated with the divine forgiveness of sins, and so it is immediately followed in the *Pater Noster* by the petition for the forgiveness of sins. But it is not only a private, but also a communal forgiveness, dependent as it is on forgiving one's fellow human beings, "as we forgive those who trespass against us." Since this feast is associated with forgiveness of sins, the *sura* announces that those who desecrate the sacred bread will receive a unique divine wrath. And this wrath is precisely what the *Pater Noster*'s final petition seeks to shield the believer from: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

The Jewish prayer called the *Kaddish* is often compared to the *Pater Noster*, on account of a number of lexical similarities shared between the two texts. Nevertheless, it is not the *Kaddish* that functionally parallels the daily recited prayers the *Fatiha* and the *Pater Noster*. A better parallel would be the daily recited profession of monotheism (and monism), the *Shema Israel*. These three prayers are also similar in that they are often recited at death. I will here confine my comments on the *Shema* to its essence, that is, its first two opening sentences in Deuteronomy 6:4-5:

4 Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Whereas the *Fatiha* and *Pater Noster* share a sevenfold structure, the two opening sentences of the *Shema* share a triadic structure. The triad of the divine names in Deuteronomy 6:4 is well known, "the LORD our God, the LORD." Less noticed is the corresponding triadic statement in verse 5, "with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." V. 4's divine triad is thus balanced by v. 5's human triad of heart, soul, and might. It is the love of Israel's heart, soul, and might that unites Israel with YHWH. This results in the two (Israel and the Holy One of Israel, blessed be he) being made one.

Love for God in this context is not an emotion, but Israel's faithfulness to their covenant with God. This faithfulness includes the unfailing recitation of the *Shema* by day and by night. This include the final night, that of death. Traditional Torah scrolls enlarge the final letter, *ayin*, of the *Shema*'s first word "Hear," *shema*, and the final letter, *dalet*, of the same sentence's final word "one," *'echad*. The two enlarged letters are then read together to form the acronym *ed*, "witness." The implication drawn from this is that one must be prepared to die rather than to renounce the monotheistic faith of Israel.

The choice for martyrdom (“witnessing”) over renunciation of Judaism is called the sanctification of the Name (YHWH). This forms a lexical point of contact with the *Pater Noster*'s petition “hallowed be thy name,” that is, “may thy Name be sanctified.” The Islamic equivalent of the *Shema* is the first part of the *Shahadah*, the Islamic profession of faith in God. The *Shema*'s triadic structure is paralleled in the Islamic *basmala*, whose triadic divine names structure (God, Merciful, Compassionate) in turn is based on Exodus 34:6's “God, merciful and gracious.” The 19 letters of the *basmala* match the 19 letters of Exodus 34:6's “**וְתָנַן רְחֹם אֱלֹהֶה יְהֹוָה**,” “The LORD, the LORD, God, merciful and gracious.”

14. The Prophetic Essence of Mary in Qur'anic Context

Sura 19:28: “O sister of Aaron!”

Sura 66:12: “And Mary, daughter of ‘Imran. . . .”

According to the Jewish scriptures, the Prophet Moses was the son of Imran. Moreover, Moses had at least two siblings, the Prophet Aaron and the Prophetess Miriam (Maryam in Arabic), or Mary. The old anti-Islamic apologetic and polemic that charged Muhammad with confusing the Hebrew Miriam with the Christian Virgin Mary is patently fallacious. If Muhammad knew the apocryphal (esoteric) stories of the Virgin Mary’s family, as the same apologists readily claim, he could not have been ignorant of her parent’s names, which are clearly recorded in the main text such polemicists propose as the Prophet’s source, namely “Joachim” and “Anna” in the *Protevangelion* of James, a document which still possesses semi-canonical status among many Christians in the East.

The question then arises, why does the Qur'an associate the Virgin Mary so intimately with the Prophet Moses’ family? A possible solution to this enigma presents itself when we examine the Qur'anic passages in question. Not only is the Virgin Mary associated with the family of Moses, she is more fundamentally associated with the Prophethood of Moses. *Sura* 2:87 mentions Jesus and Mary immediately after the words, “And verily We gave Moses the Book. . . .” Similarly, *sura* 23:49-50 states: “And verily We gave Moses the Book, that haply they might go aright. And we made the son of Mary and his mother to be a sign, and We gave them refuge on a height, a place of rest and security and water springs.”

The answer to our question now lies at hand: The Qur'an associates Mary with Moses the Prophet in order to stress that she is also a Prophet (though not in an identical sense as Moses is). Indeed, Sufis have called Mary the mother of all Prophets. In Sufi thought there is quite a profound import to the alliterative Prophetic triad “Moses, Mary, Muhammad.” Moses represents divine law; Mary represents the divine mercy; Muhammad embodies a synthesis of the two, law and mercy, so that there is a spiritually logical progression from Moses and Mary to Muhammad. Moreover, for Sufi thinkers Mary is the flowering of Moses’ Torah, or “the Book” (“scripture”), as it is denominated in the Qur'an.

In Jewish scriptures, the divine attribute of Wisdom is personified concretely as Lady Wisdom (Proverbs 8, Sirach 24, Wisdom 7). The same scriptures state that this Lady Wisdom, a celestial, preexistent entity, is on the earthly plane embodied in or manifested as the Mosaic Torah. After Lady Wisdom praises herself in Sirach 24:1-22, Ben Sira explains in v. 23: “All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us.” The Book of Baruch 3:37-4:1 also identifies preexistent heavenly Wisdom (see Baruch 3:28-29) with the Mosaic Torah: “Afterward she appeared upon earth and lived among men. She is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures for ever.”

The Qur'anic equivalent of the Jewish preexistent Lady Wisdom embodied on the earthly plane as the Torah, is the *umm al-kitab*, the celestial Mother of the Book, embodied on the earthly plane as the written Qur'an. But ultimately the earthly and heavenly Book are not two separate entities, rather there is a continuity between the two, so that the created and uncreated levels

“participate” in each other. This dialectical interplay and interpenetration constitute the heavenly and earthly Book as a single sacred entity, while not canceling the preexistent and contingent differentiations that pertain to the two respective levels. In one sense the “created” Qur'an is an emanation of the preexistent Qur'an.

On the earthly plane, Mary is an embodiment of the celestial Lady Wisdom whom the Jewish scriptures portray as inliterated in the Mosaic Torah. Here we have the principle reason why the Qur'an so intimately links Moses and the Virgin Mary. Moses was given the Book embodying Lady Wisdom, and the very same celestial Book, in its feminine dimensions, was manifested as the Virgin Mary in the Christian dispensation. That is to say, the same mercy which the Qur'an represents or conveys to creation (“And what We reveal of the Qur'an is a healing and a mercy for believers,” *sura* 17:82), is communicated to humanity through the merciful Mary, mother of all Prophets.

Mary's exaltation as announced by the choirs of angels demands an exalted Mariology: “And when the angels said: ‘O Mary! Lo! God hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above all the women of creation’ (*sura* 3:42). “Blessed art thou among women. . . . Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed” (Luke 1:42, 48). For Muslim thought, both Mary and Jesus participate in and embody the very same divine blessing. Mary and Jesus therefore constitute a single sacred sign of divine mercy in the Qur'an, and this is reflected in Luke's version of the annunciation: “Blessed art thou, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Luke 1:42). *Sura* 19:31 reaffirms the blessedness of Mary's son: “And (God) hath made me (Jesus) blessed, wheresoever I may be.” But neither son nor mother is blessed in isolation from the other. There is either a mutual blessing or no blessing at all in the Christic-Marian paradigm, for there can be no son without the mother, and the latter presupposes the former.

According to scriptures and traditions, each of the Prophets in the triad Moses, Mary, and Muhammad, was freed from all impurity before birth. Josephus writes that Moses' birth was painless (*Antiquities* II 1:220). This is a transparent reversal of the effects of the “fall,” which Genesis 3 states results in the pain of childbirth. The immaculate conception of Mary is affirmed by both Western and Eastern Christian theology, and in a qualified sense by the Qur'an (*sura* 3:36, 42), and later by Islamic theology. Muslim tradition relates the purification of Muhammad via angelic intervention as an infant on the night of his birth. The Merciful thus made the three Prophets plenary epiphanies of the divine law and mercy, in different modes to be sure. But whereas Moses and Muhammad promulgated divine laws for the people of God, Mary, who never delivered such a law, actually embodied the essence of the divine law, the celestial Book of Wisdom. Muhammad, whom Muslims hold to be the seal of the Prophets,¹⁷² cannot be understood in his essence without reference to Mary as mother of the Prophets. Indeed, Mary is the mother of Prophecy, and as such she is thus intimately related to the very essence of the Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of Prophecy.

¹⁷² Not a few Christian theologians accept, at least in a theoretical sense, the Prophethood of Muhammad. The Catholic theologian Hans Küng sees no obstacle for Catholic theology to accept Muhammad as a genuine Prophet. See Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present, and Future* (Oxford, UK: OneWorld Publications, 2007). Earlier, the Catholic scholar Louis Massignon acknowledged in print the Prophethood of Muhammad in an even more plenary sense than Küng does, and he was never censured by the Vatican for his public views. On the contrary, Massignon was universally admired and honored in his Church.

The Holy Spirit is “reflected” in richly diverse modes on varying celestial and earthly planes. On one plane, the spirit is reflected in the choirs of “angels,” preeminently in the archangel Gabriel. The Semitic-language symbolisms, by virtue of their stark concreteness of metaphorical imagery, can extend in exegetical directions that would otherwise be unacceptable within a purely Hellenistic Christian theological framework. In an analogical mode one can defend the ancient angelomorphic Jewish-Christian Christology, which identified Christ in some sense with Gabriel and Michael. The angelomorphic Christology was condemned in the West almost exclusively because the “concrete symbolic” categories of Semitic-language theology were by the time of the condemnations unknown to and therefore misunderstood by the leaders of the Great Church.

The Qur’anic identification of both Jesus and Gabriel with the spirit of God, which of course establishes some sort of “equivalence” between Jesus and Gabriel, accords with ancient Jewish-Christian theology, and is essentially therefore not indefensible from a Christian point of view. That thought based on Semitic-languages sees the divine spirit as feminine in nature offers no contradiction to the spirit also being envisaged as the male Jesus or Gabriel. This is because both feminine and masculine categories are applicable to the divine. Both, however, are in principle metaphorical. Consequently, while the divine can symbolically be simultaneously both male and female, it is also the case that God is neither male nor female in the ineffable divine Essence. Similarly, the spirit is simultaneously personal and non-personal. Regarding the latter, Luke 1:35, in its use of Hebraic-based synonymous poetic parallelism speaks of the Holy Spirit as a non-personal “power” of the divine: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most high shall overshadow thee. . . .”

On another celestial plane, the spirit is manifested as Lady Wisdom. Sophia is a breath and utterance of God, which is to say she is a spirit and Word of God. In Hebrew and Aramaic the words for spirit and breath are virtually the same. Sophia is a divine breath-spirit: “For she is a breath of the power of God” (Wisdom 7:25). Sophia is an utterance-word of God: “I came out of the mouth of the Most High” (Sirach 24:5). Wisdom and spirit are identified in Wisdom 1:4-5, the same entity being called “wisdom” in verse 4 and “Holy Spirit” in verse 5. The two are fittingly combined in verse 6 as “the spirit of Wisdom.” Wisdom 9:1-2 then identifies Sophia and Logos as equivalent creative entities. We are therefore fully justified in speaking of a single sacred entity which may be denominated the divine “Wisdom-Word.” The Sophia-Logos is grammatically and metaphorically female and male respectively. On the earthly plane, one manifestation of this “pair” is the prophetic unity Mary-Jesus, which in the Qur’anic paradigm form/s a single *baraka* (blessing). An Islamic *hadith* of the Prophet Idris (Enoch) states: “Wisdom is the spirit of life.” In view of Enoch’s status as the source of esoteric doctrine in the Kabbalah, this “Wisdom” must not be mere proverbial wisdom, but must be the preexistent Lady Wisdom, who at some point coincides with the Holy Spirit.

On the earthly plane, according to Islamic thought the spirit is reflected in the Prophets,¹⁷³ whose seal, in the Abrahamic sphere of religions, is Muhammad. Yet Mary as mother of Prophecy is the very font or fount of Prophecy and she reflects the spirit in a unique mode by virtue of the fact that she as woman analogically mirrors most fittingly the spirit in its feminine symbology and potencies. This is because “spirit” in the languages of the revealed Jewish and Jewish-Christian

¹⁷³ In the Christian scriptures we read that “God . . . spoke in times past to the fathers in the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1). 1 Peter 1:10-11 states that the Spirit of Christ dwelt in the prophets of old.

scriptures is grammatically feminine and imaged as such in sacred scripture and liturgy. In this sense, for Christians Mary is to an eminent degree a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most high shall over-shadow thee. . .” (Luke 1:35). That is, for Christian thought Mary personifies the divine Shekhinah that indwelt the Temple of Solomon and the ark of the covenant.

Pertinent here is *sura* 2:248: “And further their Prophet said unto them, Verily the sign of his kingdom shall be that the ark shall come unto you: therein shall be the Sakina (= Shekhinah) from your Lord, and the relics which have been left by the family of Moses, and the family of Aaron; the angels shall carry it. Verily this shall be a symbol unto you, if ye believe.” According to Christian allegorical interpretation, Mary is the Shekhinah of the Temple and the ark of the covenant. She thus logically issues forth from the “relics” that Moses’ and Aaron’s family preserved in the ark. The angels who carry the ark, that is, who support Mary as throne of Wisdom, are the Qur’anic angels of the annunciation. These interpretative correspondences make sense from the standpoint of faith: “Verily this [ark] shall be a symbol unto you, if ye believe.”

There are two further verses in the Qur’an which refer to the divine Sakina (Shekhinah). First is *sura* 9:26: “Afterwards God sent down his Sakina upon his apostle and upon the faithful, and sent down troops of angels which ye saw not; and he punished those who disbelieved; and this was the reward of the unbelievers. Nevertheless God will hereafter be turned unto whom he pleaseth; for God is gracious and merciful.” Second is *sura* 9:40: “Be not grieved, for God is with us. And God sent down his Sakina upon him, and strengthened him with armies of angels, whom ye saw not. and he made the word of those who believed not to be abased, and the word of God was exalted; for God is mighty and wise.”

According to a Coptic Pseudo-Cyril text:

It is written in the *Gospel to the Hebrews* that when Christ wished to come upon the earth to men, the good Father called a mighty power in the heavens which was called Michael, and committed Christ to the care thereof. And the power came down into the world and it was called Mary, and Christ was in her womb seven months. Afterwards she gave birth to him, and he increased in stature, and he chose the apostles, was crucified and taken up by the Father.

The point of this plastic and fluid theological symbolism is that the Holy Spirit is reflected in varying modes on the celestial and earthly planes. In the ancient *Epistle of the Apostles*, roughly contemporary with the Gospel of John, we read in chapters 13 and 14 that Jesus was in a sense equivalent to the archangel Gabriel who announced his own conception to Mary:

Now that which he revealed unto us is this, which he spake: It came to pass when I was about to come hither from the Father of all things, and passed through the heavens, then did I put on the wisdom of the Father, and I put on the power of his might. I was in heaven, and I passed by the archangels and the angels in their likeness, like as if I were one of them, among the princedoms and powers. I passed through them because I possessed the wisdom of him that had sent me. Now the chief captain of the angels, is Michael. Michael and Gabriel and Uriel and Raphael followed me unto the fifth heaven, for they thought in their heart that I was one of them; such power was given me of my Father. And on that day did I

adorn the archangels with a wonderful voice, so that they should go unto the altar of the Father and serve and fulfill the ministry until I should return unto him. And so wrought I the likeness by my wisdom; for I became all things in all, that I might praise the dispensation of the Father and fulfill the glory of him that sent me and return unto him. For ye know that the angel Gabriel brought the message unto Mary. And we answered: Yea, Lord. He answered and said unto us: Remember ye not, then, that I said unto you a little while ago: I became an angel among the angels, and I became all things in all? We said unto him: Yea, Lord. Then answered he and said unto us: On that day whereon I took the form of the angel Gabriel, I appeared unto Mary and spake with her. Her heart accepted me, and she believed, and I formed myself and entered into her body. I became flesh, for I alone was an angel (= messenger) unto myself in that which concerned Mary in the appearance of the shape of an angel. For so was I wont to do. thereafter did I return to my Father.

Again, the fluid symbolism ultimately serves to emphasize that the divine *logos*, *sophia*, and spirit cannot be bound and limited to any one particular manifestation or Prophetic epiphany. The fact that the *Epistle of the Apostles* is an ancient anti-Gnostic treatise indicates that the primitive angelomorphic Christology is not of Gnostic origin, but of Jewish-Christian provenance, or what amounts to the same, of apostolic origin. In this respect, as in others (though not in all respects of course), some of the Gnostics were heirs to the Jewish-Christian apostolic kerygma.

The Holy Spirit overshadows Mary because she is, by virtue of her being Lady Wisdom on the earthly plane, a plenary manifestation of the spirit. Not only is Mary indwelt by the spirit as was the Temple, but *sura* 3:37 implies allegorically that Mary is inseparable from the innermost sacred mystery of the Temple. The Qur'anic text here specifies that Mary dwelt in the Sanctuary, that is, in the holy of holies. This agrees with the tradition recorded in the *Protevangelion* of James 8:1 and 13:2, according to which she is fed from the hand of an angel: "And Mary was in the Temple of the Lord as a dove that is nurtured: and she received food from the hand of an angel." "Why hast thou humbled thy soul, thou that wast nourished up in the holy of holies and didst receive food at the hand of an angel?" Compare Qur'an *sura* 3:37: "Whenever Zechariah went into the sanctuary where she was, he found that she had food. He said: 'O Mary! Whence cometh unto thee this (food)? she answered: 'It is from God. God giveth without stint to whom he will.'"¹⁷⁴

Only the high priest could enter the holy of holies, and that but once a year, to utter the divine name and to beg forgiveness for humanity's sins. The sacred symbolism of Mary's constant abiding in the holy of holies implies that Mary is inseparable from the sacred mysteries which constitute the holy of holies. Her access thereto is plenary; males have far less a right of entrance granted to them. Mary is the high priest, otherwise she could not visit, much less perpetually abide in, the holy of holies. This must be the belief reflected in the *Protevangelion* of James as well as the Qur'an. Indeed, Mary is an embodiment of the spirit which is the very essence and holiness of the innermost sanctuary. Leaders of the Catholic Church in modern times banned the traditional symbolism made venerable by the Fathers of the Church of Mary as the Priest of Priests, which ultimately can only refer to Mary as the high priest. Islamic authorities similarly often claim that no woman was ever a Prophet; but then why is Mary's biography recited in *sura* 21, which bears the

¹⁷⁴ Note the correspondence of Mary as dove with the dove as a traditional symbol of the Holy Spirit, who is the celestial Mother in Eastern and Semitic-language Christian theologies.

title, “the Prophets”? Mary is Prophet in the sense that she is the mother of Prophecy, the full font or fount of prophecy, and as a consequence mother of the Prophets, including of Muhammad as seal of the Prophets, who as a mercy to all the worlds is preeminently a spiritual son of Mary the mother of mercy.¹⁷⁵

The *Gospel of the Hebrews* states:

And it came to pass when the lord was come up out of the water, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon him, and said unto him: My son, in all prophets was I waiting for thee that thou shouldst come, and I might rest in thee. For thou art my rest, thou art my first begotten son, that reignest for ever.

As we have quoted previously, the same ancient gospel records Jesus referring to “my mother the Holy Spirit.” The synoptic gospel tradition that has Jesus distancing himself from his mother Mary is but a reflection of the fact that more important than Mary’s status as physical mother of the messiah is her status as earthly manifestation of the celestial Lady Wisdom, or in anagogically equivalent language, the Holy Spirit in Marian mode. Therefore the *Gospel of Thomas* 101 balances the negative stance of Jesus with a corresponding positive proclamation, the penultimate statement being unfortunately missing from the sole surviving Coptic manuscript: “Jesus said: ‘Whoever hates not his father and mother the way I do cannot be my disciple. But whoever loves not his father and mother the way I do cannot be my disciple. For my mother [...], but my true mother gave me life.’” Mary, as earthly manifestation of Lady Wisdom cannot fail but to impart simultaneously to her son both earthly and celestial life.

In the Latin versions of Sirach 24, Wisdom says of herself: “I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. in me is the grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue” (Latin version vv. 24-25). This sophianic constellation finds its parallel in the “Logos” statement: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Sophia is a “plenary” possessor and distributor of divine life: “In me is all hope of life.” The fact that the Sirach “absolute” statement is attributed to Mary in the Church’s liturgies shows that although Jesus claims to be the absolute truth and life, “*the truth, the life,*” the absoluteness in question must apply to the divine source of life and truth rather than to its manifestations in Mary and Jesus as historical personages.

In the Christic sphere, the *logos* is identified with the absolute truth and life. In the Marian sphere, the Virgin Sophia is identified with the absolute truth and life. The situation is partly explained by the fact that on the earthly plane a “plenary” manifestation of the divine is possible in a certain sense, but given the ontological limitations of all manifestations—including divine manifestations—in the realm of contingency, no such manifestation can be definitive in the sense of being exhaustive. Regarding the distinctions between the created humanity of Jesus and the preexistent Word, we observe that the Sirach and John verses both refer to a state that is absolute with regard to plenary divine manifestation of the celestial. However, we are also dealing with a

¹⁷⁵ This is to say that Mary is the very source of the divine Mercy of which Muhammad is a channel to the worlds. See Qur'an *sura* 21:107: “We have not sent thee, O Muhammad, but as a Mercy unto all the worlds.”

manifestation that is relative because of the impossibility of definitive, exhaustive ontological manifestation of the divine on the earthly plane.

The source is plenary, but the manifestation, being on the earthly plane, is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. If one wishes to retain the language of exclusiveness, one could perhaps validly speak in this context of an inclusive or shared exclusivity, or even of a diverse or diversified exclusivity. A polymorphous manifestation of plenary exclusivity would also be a possible expressive alternative. In any event, when the subject is related to ontology and the divine, one immediately encounters the many limitations at the dialectical horizons of human thought and language.

To return to the beginning, in Jewish thought celestial Lady Wisdom is embodied or inliterated on the earthly plane as the Torah scroll. The celestial and earthly Torah/s cannot be identified exhaustively with each other. One way to describe the incomplete overlap between the celestial and earthly Torah is to recall the white spaces in a Torah scroll. Lori A. Kanitz explains that these “white spaces represent the unseen but immanent presence of God and imply an ‘inherent fullness’ or ‘semantic pregnancy’ held within a blank space. Even so, it is a deeply paradoxical plenitude. The white spaces of the Torah do not ‘contain’ linguistic signifiers and therefore cannot “mean” any one thing but can potentially mean everything.”¹⁷⁶ A comparable way of interpreting a Torah scroll’s white spaces is to identify these white spaces as the hidden text of the celestial Torah. The white spaces reflect the metalinguistic divine mind that generates the scroll’s black letters.

¹⁷⁶ Lori A. Kanitz, *A Literary Shema: Annie Dillard’s Judeo-Christian Vision and Voice* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020), pp. 131-132.

15. Mary as Prophet and “Philosopher”

Qur'an *sura* 3:

45. O Mary, verily God sendeth thee good tidings, that thou shalt bear a Word, proceeding from himself; his name shall be Christ Jesus the son of Mary, honourable in this world and in the world to come, and one of those who approach near to the presence of God.

47. She answered, Lord, how shall I have a son, since a man hath not touched me? The angel said, So God createth that which he pleaseth: when he decreeth a thing, he only saith unto it, Be, and it is.

Qur'an *sura* 19:

16. Relate in the Book (the story of) Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East.

17. She took a curtain (of the Temple) from them; then We sent her our spirit, and he appeared before her as a Perfected man.

18. She said: “I seek refuge from thee to (God) most Gracious: (come not near) if thou dost fear God.”

19. He said: “Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord, (to announce) to thee the gift of a holy son.”

20. She said: “How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?”

21. He said: “So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, That is easy for me: And (We wish) to appoint him as a sign unto men and a mercy from Us: It is a matter (so) decreed.”

22. So she conceived him, and she retired with him to a remote place.

“O Mary, verily God sendeth thee good tidings.” The good news is “that thou shalt bear a Word, proceeding from himself,” that is, from God. The Arabic text reads *bi-kalimatin*, “with (a) word” (feminine “word”); the same phrase *bi-kalimatin* also occurs in *sura* 3:39. *Sura* 4:171 refers to Jesus as *kalimatuhu*, “his (God’s) word.” *Sura* 3:39 and 45 describe Jesus by using an associative indefinite article, “*a* Word proceeding from God.” By contrast, *sura* 4:171 implies that Jesus is *the* word of God, implying a definite article in a relatively identitative sense, “*the* Word proceeding from God.” Both expressions are allowed in Islamic theology, with certain qualifications. No less an authority than Ibn ‘Abbas held that “Jesus is the Word of God.” Furthermore, the standard title for Jesus with which he is addressed in the Islamic Jesus *ahadith* is “O Jesus, Word and spirit of God.” The qualification in *sura* 3:39 and 45, implying that Jesus is *a* word of God, brings to mind the idea, as Thomas Aquinas observed, that no human nature, including that of Jesus, can be identified with the uncreated Word as such, otherwise the divine would be limited and circumscribed by the created.

What is the procession of the Word from God referred to in *sura* 3:45? The Gospel of John 15:26 speaks of a secret procession in the context of the Last Supper discourse, the same discourse wherein Jesus promises the coming of the prophetic Paraclete: “But when the Paraclete cometh,

whom I shall send you from the Father, the spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, she shall give testimony of me.”¹⁷⁷ The Word proceeds from God: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: Again I leave the world, and I go to the Father” (John 16:28).¹⁷⁸ The Qur’anic procession of the Word certainly involves the procession of God’s creative Word, “Be!” (*Kun!*; *Fiat!*). Yet God does not act “in time,” and in some Islamic models the divine attributes are assuredly eternal, uncreated, though they are revealed to and in the world which exists in temporality.

The procession of the Word in time, to Mary via Gabriel the Perfect Man, is anagogically inseparable from the eternal, atemporal “procession.” If the Logos is preexistent, and this Logos is manifested as the Prophet Jesus, then so is the same preexistent divine entity manifested on the earthly plane as Mary, foreshadowed under the figure of Lady Wisdom. This is to say that the same celestial referent encompasses both the attributes of Word and Wisdom, so that the two are functionally synonymous to some degree. Insofar as the two are divine attributes, they refer ultimately to, or originate from, Being itself, *Ipsum Esse*, though there can never be any question of an identity of the divine hypostases (or “emanations” as Islamic philosophy would prefer to call them) with the divine Essence as such.

Plotinus in his Fifth *Ennead* VIII. 4 understands Sophia, primordial Wisdom, as the essence of Being in relation to cosmic emanation (“assessor to the divine intellect as projected into manifestation”). Again, Wisdom is the intellectual Principle, which in turn is real Being, or authentic Being. Primal Wisdom is not “added to the Being, but is its very essence.” Wisdom “embraces all the real Beings, and has made all, and all follow it, and yet it is itself those beings, which sprang into being with it, so that all is one, and the essence there is wisdom.” Plotinus reinforces this role of Wisdom in cosmic emanation in Fifth *Ennead* VIII. 5: “Everywhere a wisdom presides at a making.” Moreover, “the intellectual Principle engendered . . . Wisdom . . . from itself . . . , [therefore] it is itself Wisdom.” Wisdom is *Esse* (not Beyond-Being of course): “The true Wisdom is real Being. . . . and Being is real in virtue of its origin in Wisdom.”

¹⁷⁷ See Qur’an *sura* 61:6: “And when Jesus the son of Mary said, O children of Israel, verily I am the apostle of God sent unto you, confirming the law which was delivered before me, and bringing good tidings of an apostle who shall come after me, and whose name shall be The Glorified One.” The essential paradigm established in this verse, according to Islamic opinion, is that the Prophet Jesus’ message is not incongruous with either the past (Jewish) or future (Islamic) revelations. Muhammad preached the one true God, and God is Spirit and Truth. Muhammad was anointed with the Spirit Paraclete to proclaim the divine message of monotheism. This understanding would accord well with those Islamic exegetes who see the promised Ahmad as the spiritual or heavenly aspect of Muhammad, and not strictly as the “historical” Muhammad alone. That is to say, Ahmad is from one angle of theological vision the divine Spirit bestowed upon Muhammad constituting him an apostle of God.

¹⁷⁸ Thus John 15:26 and 16:28 narrate the procession of both the Word and the Spirit from God. Similarly the Qur’an speaks of the procession not only of the Word (*sura* 3:34), but also of the Spirit: “Verily Christ Jesus the Son of Mary is the apostle of God, and his Word, which he conveyed unto Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from himself” (*sura* 4:171). Here the Word and Spirit are basically equivalent terms standing for the same sacred state. The Qur’an is thus aligned with the early Jewish-Christian pneumatic Christology, as found, for instance, throughout the *Shepherd of Hermas*.

These insights are by no means weakened, only differentiated, by the statement that then follows in section 6 that “this Wisdom [does] not itself contain. . . the causes by which Being exists,” for Wisdom nevertheless “imparts [the causes] to the entities produced in Being’s realm.” The “sub-ordinate” distinction between authentic Being (*Ipsum Esse*) and *sophia* agrees with the distinction between the ineffable deity and the divine as creator or cosmic emanator and revealer. Some would designate this pair as the Beyond-Being and Being. Consider, for example, Iamblicus and Pseudo-Dionysius. Regarding Iamblicus’ distinction between Being and Beyond-Being, this does not necessarily constitute a doctrine of “two powers.” Nor is his Beyond-Being concept necessarily a contradiction of the Plotinian system, but would appear to be a “refinement” of the same outlook. It is ultimately related to Plotinus’ distinction between authentic Being and *sophia*, which is none other than authentic Being in the mode of cosmic emanator. Plotinus himself speaks of the all-transcending which is Beyond-Being, so that Iamblicus’ refinement, problematic as it might be, possesses a certain kind of legitimacy and even predictability within the post-Plotinian Neoplatonic tradition.

In the West, the distinction in question could be referred to as the immanent deity and the economic deity, the latter being God as revealed in the economy of salvation. What is at question here is human intellection pondering the same unitary divine mystery from different sacred viewpoints. In Hindu theologies, one would speak of the transpersonal Brahman and the personal Brahman, that is, *Nirguna-Brahman* (God without attributes) and *Saguna-Brahman* (God with attributes). These two constitute a single Brahman considered under differing viewpoints. One is intrinsic and absolute and simplex (divine as ineffable, the God of the Philosophers). The other is extrinsic and absolute in a relative mode on account of the diversity of divine attributes. This pertains to the divine as creator, emanator, which is equivalent to Hindu Ishvarah, i.e., Lord, corresponding basically with the Abrahamic God of scriptural revelations.

Eastern Christian thought speaks of the divine Essence and the divine energies, but the two are merged synthetically in the West in the unitive *Ipsum Esse*. Ultimately one could conceivably reconcile the Eastern Beyond-Being with the Western *Ipsum Esse*, given that both terms are considered by the respective parties as the most fundamental way of speaking of God by use of the symbol “Being.” We say “symbol” here because every word in human language, including “Being,” is ultimately symbolic and even metaphorical in the wider cognitive and semantic domains.

These questions are fraught with difficulties, but they may be conducive to attempts at reconciling, to the degrees possible at least, the differing interpretations of the unitary divine Essence in the three Abrahamic religious variants. Islam can allow distinctions in divinity only at the level of Being, not Beyond-Being. The latter is absolute and unitary in all respects, beyond all number, whether one or three. The former, Being, is the level where number becomes applicable to God, for it is on this plane that relativity and diversity can be associated with the divine, specifically in relation to the cosmos. At the theological level, Hinduism is as strict as Islam in denying any distinctions in the divine Essence. Distinctions can occur only at the level of emanation (or creation). Hinduism’s virtual infinity of “gods,” like Judaism’s multitude of angels, in no way affects the unitary nature of Brahman. As the *Upanishads* repeatedly stress, “Brahman is One without a second.”

The Qur’anic Mary and Jesus are inseparably linked and constitute a single sacred entity. The Prophet Jesus is ever and always “Jesus the son of Mary.” This unity is reflected in the fact that Lady Wisdom on the celestial and earthly planes is viewed in the Church as both the man Jesus and

the woman Mary. Here of course we are in the realm of sacred mysteries, of interplays between the created and the uncreated, or at least the preexistent. To a degree a part of the solution must lie in a synthesis of the orthodox Islamic doctrine of the uncreated Word of God and the Mu‘tazilite doctrine of the created Word of God. The uncreated Word appears under the veils of created words. This appearance is both limitative and expansive, and simultaneously and necessarily so.

The eternal Word is limited by the event of entrance into the realm of contingency, yet human, created words are “blessed” by the divine *tanzil* (descent) of the uncreated Word. This descent imparts to human cognition and language a potentially infinite capacity to reflect upon and explicate sacred truths definitively, infallibly, though never exhaustively so. The limitation results from the fact that human relativity and finitude are never destroyed by the effects of the gifts imparted by means of the divine *tanzil*. The transontological¹⁷⁹ nature of the human mind, constituted thus by virtue of humanity being the *imago Dei*,¹⁸⁰ ensures that the intellect is capable of contemplating and effectively and adequately interpreting sacred truths in a saving, authoritative manner.

From Christian and Islamic perspectives, Mary in a sense is, as manifestation of *sophia* on the earthly plane, both Prophet and “philosopher.” She is the latter as recipient of the divine Word (*logos*; cf. the cognate word ‘logic’) proceeding from the Eternal. Her response to the angel Gabriel as recorded in the Qur’an is intellectually reflective in a transparently “challenging” mode: “How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?” Or as Luke transmits the same question: “How shall this be done, because I know not man?” Mary is first “confrontational,” though her posture presupposes a willing submission to a faith statement that can be demonstrated to rest upon “reasonable,” or better, “intellectual” grounds; submission implies a holy confrontation.

It is only after intellectual grounds are presented to her from the angelic message of Gabriel, the Perfect Man, that Mary accepts the validity and truthfulness of the angelic pronouncement. Islam, as primordial submission, similarly implies a submission of truth claims to the criteria of reason and intellection. There is an interplay between the submission of the intellect and the submission of faith, as Luke records Mary’s response: “Be it done to me according to thy word.” The same is enunciated in Qur’an *sura* 66:12: “And Mary, daughter of ‘Imran, whose body was chaste, therefore We breathed therein of Our spirit. And she put faith in the words of her Lord and his scriptures, and was of the obedient.” Faith must therefore be grounded in the intellect, and the

¹⁷⁹ By “transontological” we refer to both Meister Eckhart’s teaching on the mind as uncreated, ‘increase’, and Proclus’ doctrine on the supraontological status of the gods (especially as they stand in relation to God) as explicated in his *Elements of Theology*. From this angle, the Biblical statement “I have said ye are gods” would have reference to the human as manifestation of intellectual powers. In relation to Proclus’ teaching on the relationship of the One to the Many, or of God to the gods, the following observations of Plotinus, *Fifth Ennead* VIII. 9, would not be out of place: “He who is the one God and all the gods, where each is all, blending into a unity, distinct in powers but all one God in virtue of that one divine power of many facets. More truly, this is the one God who is all the gods; for, in the coming to be of all those, this, the one, has suffered no diminishing.” To this we could add *Bhagavadgita* 11:15: “In thy body, Oh God, I beheld all the gods.” The Prophet Muhammad also taught that all the gods are the one God. Qur’an *sura* 38:5 (M. A. S. Abdel Haleem version): “How can he claim that all the gods are but one God?”

¹⁸⁰ We are not hereby identifying the mind with the *imago Dei* in a restrictive sense, for the latter is reflected by and in the human totality, encompassing the body as well as mind or spirit.

latter constitutes a sure foundation in light of the fact that the human mind participates in the eternal spirit which is its ultimate source and matrix.

Christians believe that the uncreated and creating Word and the created divine Word meet in Mary as the earthly manifestation and theophany of Lady Wisdom. That both Jesus and Mary manifest the same preexistent Word-Wisdom also has the consequence in Christian theology that both, and not Jesus alone, are universal signs of the divine mercy. It is a given in Islamic thought that Jesus is a sign of divine mercy, as *sura* 19:21 articulates: “He said: ‘So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, That is easy for me: And (We wish) to appoint him [Jesus] as a sign unto men and a mercy from Us: It is a matter (so) decreed.’” But in the final analysis, Jesus and Mary constitute a single sacred sign, not two separate signs. Such is implied by *sura* 21:91: “And remember her [Mary] who preserved her virginity, and into whom we breathed of our spirit; ordaining her and her son for a sign unto all the worlds.” Similarly *sura* 23:50 announces in majestic diction: “And we appointed the son of Mary, and his mother, for a sign: And we prepared an abode for them in an elevated part of the earth, being a place of quiet and security, and watered with running springs.” Such a universal signification surely implies and is predicated upon the presence of a plenitude of mercy within the dual divine sign named Mary and Jesus son of Mary. Muhammad is a mercy unto all creation; Mary and Jesus are a sign unto all creation (see *sura* 21:91, 107).

In the very era when Christian Mariology was achieving its heights it was no coincidence that Jewish kabbalists, adopting a strategy of sacred resistance,¹⁸¹ appropriated Christian Marian terminology and applied it to the Jewish theme of the Shekhinah.¹⁸² In this way, the language of the Christian oppressors was put into the service of Judaism. Perhaps the most astonishing appropriation in this regard was the *Zohar*’s identification of R. Simeon b. Yohai as the preexistent *logos*. This involved a polemic against John 1:1ff. The *Zohar* even read into Genesis 1:1’s Hebrew word *bara* (“created”) an allusion to R. Simeon b. Yohai as the son (Aramaic *bar*) of God. Yehuda Liebes writes as follows on this topic:

In the *Zohar* we have found R. Simeon b. Yohai described as the son of God in the technical and precise sense of the concept. . . . See *Zohar*, III:61b: “And R. Simeon b. Yohai from the first day of Creation was stationed before the Holy One Blessed be He, and God called him by his name. Happy is his portion, as it is written [Proverbs xxiii; 25]: ‘Your father and your mother shall be glad’—your father, this is God, and your mother, this is Knesset Israel.” . . .

. The description of R. Simeon b. Yohai as being with God on the day the world was created is reminiscent of the description of the *logos*, which is identified with Jesus, at the beginning

¹⁸¹ See Ellen D. Haskell, *Mystical Resistance: Uncovering the Zohar’s Conversations with Christianity* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁸² See Arthur Green, “Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Christian Context,” *AJS Review* 26/1 (2002): pp. 1-52; Tzahi Weiss, “Who Is a Beautiful Maiden without Eyes? The Metamorphosis of a Zohar Midrashic Image from a Christian Allegory to a Kabbalistic Metaphor,” *The Journal of Religion* 93/1 (2013): pp. 60-76; Elliot R. Wolfson, “Beautiful Maiden Without Eyes: *Peshat* and *Sod* in Zoharic Hermeneutics,” in Michael Fishbane, ed., *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 155-203.

of John's Gospel, and it seems to me that the author of the Zohar was influenced by this in his description.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*. Translated from the Hebrew by Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, Penina Peli (SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion; Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1993), p. 239.

16. Silence and Night

In the lives of saints one often encounters what is known as the “gift of tears.” The essence of weeping is the pain of loss, and the greatest loss on the earthly plane is that of Eden. Eden represents that stage of hominin development that precedes either the agricultural or pastoral way of life symbolized respectively by Cain and Abel. That is, Eden is to be correlated with a gatherer way of life. We must omit the term “hunter” here because in the Genesis story, humans were vegetarian until after the great deluge of Noah. The deluge story holds civilization, that is the city-dwelling way of life, as a betrayal of human nature so serious as to basically require human extinction. Such is the Jewish narrative.

We move now to the Islamic narrative. The gnostic weeps in the night of the revelation of the Word, the night of majesty, of *al-Qadr*. The night of revelation is the hand of Fatima, for the night corresponds to Fatima, and the hand connotes revelation. Fatima symbolizes the hand of God, the revelation of God. One can recall here the imagery of the finger of God that stands for revelation in Exodus 31:18 and Deuteronomy 9:10. The night is the divine silence, the concealment of the Voice, for the tears of night are silent. The gnostic’s tears are not of the *vox*, but of the *nox*, indeed, they are of the very eyes of night. Being the eyes, the silence of tears refers to the light of revelation, of insight, and therefore of gnosis.

As Fatima, according to various Islamic exegetes, is a manifestation on the earthly plane of the *umm al-kitab*, the Mother of the Book, so Mary is the earthly manifestation of the silence of the *umm al-kitab*. Fatima is the night; Mary is the matrix of silence constituting the night, a mystery contained in the Qur’anic account of Mary’s fast of silence. The Garden of Eden in this context comes to symbolize Fatima and Mary, indeed, all earthly theophanies of the *umm al-kitab*. The Garden of Eden therefore refers to the *umm al-kitab*’s principle of manifestation.

The loss of Eden consequently is the eclipse of the *vox noctis*, the voice of the night, the revelation of the *kitab*, or the revelation which the *kitab* constitutes. Indeed, the *umm al-kitab* “unites” the “opposites” of Silence and Word (of *nox* and *vox*). The *umm*, the mother, is the suprasensible, unspoken form of the *kitab*, whereas the *kitab* is the sensible form of the mother. *Kitab*, book, denotes plenary manifestation of *umm*, mother, for a book is a complete explication of a topic, in this context, of the mother. *Umm* is matrix of the revealed *kitab*. *Umm* is one, *kitab* is multiple. Each contains the principle of the other. The *umm* cannot but manifest herself on the celestial and earthly planes, and the *kitab* cannot but contain within himself the principle of the unitive matrix. *Kitab* is the manifestation of the *umm*.

In an Islamic setting, heaven, earth, and the Garden of Eden may refer allegorically to Muhammad, ‘Ali, and Fatima. In a Christian context these would correspond to Jesus, John the Baptizer, and Mary. Both Jesus and John possess an essential Marian dimension. John was conceived in the wake of his father Zachariah’s prayer, which was prompted by his discovery of the Mary being fed by the hands of angels. John’s conception is thus inextricably linked to the “angelic” dimension of Mary.

Muhammad and ‘Ali (like John the Baptizer and Jesus) represent the exoteric and esoteric aspects of the *umm al-kitab*, while Fatima constitutes the *umm*, which is the substance of esoterism as such, which is concealment and divine silence. In this sense, the matrix, though one, is simultaneously the whole by implicate configuration in proleptic mode, or by her innate principle of

tendency towards manifestation, an overflowing pointing towards the diverse names of God. This suggests that *kitab* is a divine name. It also intimates that the cosmos is a theophanic unveiling of the divine.

The principle of the *umm* towards manifestation is the *lux Dei*, and therefore the *kitab* aspect of the *umm* is alluded to in the sacred verse: “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). Not that the divine light as such is created, but that its refraction issues forth into the contingent realm, the cosmic plane of entification. The uncreated light is in this way indirectly manifested in the creation. The created light is but the emanation of the uncreated light. It is in this sense that we can say that the human intellect is but a refraction, or reflection, of the divine intellect.

Wisdom as light is explicated as follows in Wisdom 7:26: “For she is the brightness of the eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God’s majesty, and the image of his goodness.” Wisdom as the plenary reflection of the majesty of God in this verse calls to mind the statement to the *al-Qadr sura* pertaining to the descent of the Word on the night of majesty. The Latin version of Sirach 24:6 has Lady Wisdom proclaim: “I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth, and as a cloud I covered all the earth.” *Ego feci in caelis ut oriretur lumen indeficiens, et sicut nebula texi omnem terram.* The Sirach verse pertains to both the solar and lunar dimensions of Wisdom by speaking of her light (solar) and her cloud of concealment (lunar).

“The night is peace until the dawn breaks” (*sura al-Qadr* 5). The mother is silence until the light of the *kitab* dawns. The silent word issues forth into the spoken words of revelation. Unspoken tears yearn for the return to the originative matrix of divine silence. The night is thus the eclipse of the voice, *nox vocis*, which is, however, a speaking silence, *vox noctis*. The *umm al-kitab* is consequently the *mater vocis*. According to Wisdom 1:7, the universal divine spirit has knowledge of the voice: “For the spirit of the Lord hath filled the whole world: and that, which containeth all things, hath knowledge of the voice.” Mother of the Book, silence of the voice, and voice of silence. Every archetype must necessarily manifest itself in the realm of sensible forms, and every sensible form contains in itself the principle of its archetype, which is to say that every sensible form is but the sensible mode of an archetype.

The *umm al-kitab* is mirrored in the Christian phrase, “in the beginning was the Word,” *In principio erat Verbum*. In the “principle” was the Word: in the archetype was the sensible manifestation of the archetype, or the ex-principiation of the in-principiation. The Jewish *Targum Neofiti* renders Genesis 1:1’s phrase, “in the beginning” as “in Wisdom,” which brings us full circle to the *umm al-kitab* as the equivalent of the Jewish scriptures’ personified preexistent Lady Wisdom (Proverbs 8; Sirach 24; Wisdom 7), through whom God effects creation. The Qur’an equivalently states: “We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them save with truth” (*sura* 15:85). The truth (reality) “coincides” with the *umm al-kitab*, with celestial Wisdom. The Latin version of Sirach 24:25 accordingly identifies Lady Wisdom with the plenitude of truth: “In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue.” *In me gratia omnis via et veritatis: in me omnis spes vitae et virtutis.*

From a Christian viewpoint, by virtue of the Logos’ “derivation” from Wisdom (as son from mother), Jesus in his “celestiality” can be made to say: “I am the truth.” As truth derives from Wisdom, we have in Jesus’ declaration of being the truth no “usurpation” of the divine principle in itself. This is further clarified by the fact that Jesus, when he proclaimed himself the truth, prefaced this by saying “I am the Way.” A way is not a principle in itself, but is the means and *via* to the principle. Jesus as Prophet is the way to God, but in another sense, anagogical one, to the sacred

Father, the tenth intelligence, the active intelligence, the Holy Spirit. Once again, the Holy Spirit “coincides” with the *umm al-kitab*, as Jesus referred to “my mother the Holy Spirit.” The way to the sacred Father—to the truth—is constituted in the mode of life: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He is the way to the sacred Father; Jesus is the earthly manifestation of the sacred Father, on one level in the sense of the active intelligence, which coincides with the Holy Spirit as *umm al-kitab*, who is Jesus’ mother. Jesus is the life because to know is to be, to live, to be living. Thus Jesus spoke of the “living Father,” for the sacred Father is consciousness as such. We could rephrase the sacred saying of Christ: “I am the way to the Father who is living consciousness.”

“I am come that you might have life in all its fullness” (John 10:10). This means on one level: “I am come to reveal to you the way to the living universal intellect in all its fullness.” “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Jesus and the Nous are one, just as the divine light is the *Nur Muhammadi* in an Islamic setting. Thus we arrive at the sacred mother (*umm al-kitab*) and the sacred Father (*kitab, nous*). The *kitab* is refracted (in partial mode) or reflected (in existentiated, contingent plenary mode) through the various cosmic realms, ten specifically, in accord with traditional Islamic philosophy and the Kabbalistic tenfold sefirotic system. The ten intelligences, which ultimately are One, are/is the sacred Father. “I and the Father are one,” for Jesus is the son (*kitab*) of the mother (*umm*).

In the Islamic dispensation, the Holy Spirit is traditionally identified with the archangel Gabriel. But Islamic tradition is multifaceted on this issue, for it has been recognized by various authorities that the *al-Qadr sura* differentiates the spirit from the angels, and gives the spirit precedence over the angels. Additionally, Jesus is traditionally addressed in Islamic *ahadith* as follows: “Oh spirit and Word of God!” It is transparent that the *ruh* cannot be exhaustively identified with either Gabriel or Jesus, which is the equivalent of saying that both Gabriel and Jesus are varying manifestations of the *ruh*. (Recall that Paul identifies Jesus as the spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:17: “Now the Lord is the spirit”).

Jewish and Jewish-Christian (Ebionite) traditions emphasize the feminine theophanies of the spirit in Sarah, in Mary, and in the personified preexistent Ecclesia. The spirit is therefore not limited to masculine modes of entification. That also in Islamic thought the spirit can possess feminine manifestations is connoted first by the non-exhaustive identification of the spirit with Gabriel, for Jesus is also the spirit. Moreover the mystery of the spirit Gabriel’s annunciation to the Mary intimates the “openness” of the spirit to feminine modalities. This is to say that the spirit Gabriel approaches Mary because of an essential “spiritual” affinity, or proximity of shared “being” between Gabriel and Mary. This is indicative of the celestial, “angelic” nature of Mary, and the “feminine” dimension of Gabriel, which is integrated with the masculine reality, preserving and complementing rather than removing the latter. The *ruh*, as a non-physical entity, is in itself neither male nor female, Yet metaphorically and symbolically it possesses both masculine and feminine modes of expression.

In the annunciation story, Mary represents the *umm*, and Gabriel represents the *kitab* in theophanic mode of manifestation. Here Gabriel, as celestial manifestation of the *kitab* on earth, foreshadows the earthly appearance of the *kitab* in Christic mode. This symbolic equivalence between Gabriel and Jesus surfaces in the “gnostic” Jewish-Christian equation of Gabriel and Jesus, which implies that in Gabriel inheres a Christic “propensity.” It also implies that Jesus possesses an “angelic” or “Gabrielian” dimension, both being “embodiments” of the mighty man of God, which

corresponds to the Qur'anic and sufic Perfect Man (Pleromatic man), who is Gabriel in angelic mode, and Jesus in human and "incarnational" mode.

The Jewish-Christian doctrine that Mary was an earthly manifestation of the archangel Michael can be explained in the same way, as indicating that Michael possesses a Marian "propensity," just as Mary embraces an "angelic" essence." This calls to mind the Christian title Queen of the angels, which esoterically accords with Fatima's traditional title of Lady of the angels. The annunciation would thus indicate the "meeting" of the angelic states of "Gabriel" and "Michael." Gabriel means "mighty man of God," whereas Michael means "Who is like God?" This establishes both distance from and nearness to the divine plane. Distance connotes the exoteric; nearness connotes the esoteric. In every unveiling, a residuum of veiling remains. This is because ultimately the dyad of the esoteric-exoteric is but a provisional pedagogical tool not to taken literally.

Sura Maryam 16-17 records that Mary "withdrew herself from her people to a chamber looking East, and took a curtain/ veil [of the Temple] from them." For Philo, the east is an allusion to the Garden of Eden, because according to Genesis 2:8 Paradise was located in the east. The Hebrew word "east," *qedem*, also bears the meaning of "beginning," indicating that this is the sacred east, not the geographic east. Allegorically considered, in the Garden of Eden, Mary received a curtain or veil, for she is thought of as the night of concealment. Malachi 3:20 (Eng 4:2): "The sun of righteousness shall arise, with health in her wings." The word 'sun' in hebrew, as in arabic, can be grammatically feminine. "Health" in Hebrew is *marpay*, a synonym of *shalom*, "peace," with which is also associated the ideas of wholeness and salvation. *Al-Qadr sura* ends as follows in aya 5: "She is peace (*salam*) until the dawn breaks." Both the Malachi verse and *al-Qadr aya* 5 may refer allegorically to the solar aspects of Mary and Fatima.

The "confluence" of the Holy Spirit and the Mary is indicated by *suras Maryam* and *al-Ma'idah*:

Sura Maryam 29-30: Then she pointed to him to answer them. they said: How can we talk to one who is in the cradle, a young boy? He spake. . . .

Sura Al-Ma'idah 110: I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit, so that thou spakest unto mankind in the cradle. . . .

In the first account, the cause of Jesus' speaking in the cradle is Mary's pointing to him with her hand. The second account attributes the cause to the Holy Spirit's assistance. Anagogically viewed, this implies that Mary and the spirit coincide, Mary being a manifestation of the celestial *ruh* on the terrestrial plane. Mary pointed to Jesus with her hand, which is a symbol of the Holy Spirit with reference to writing, thus to the *kitab*. In Luke 11:20 Jesus says that he expels demons "by the finger of God." Matthew 12:28 records the same saying, but has Jesus proclaiming that he expels demons "by the spirit of God." The finger, or hand, of God, and the spirit of God are thus synonymous terms. Mary's hand is therefore a symbol of the Holy Spirit, so that we may say: *Manus Mariae Spiritus Dei est*; the hand of Mary is the spirit of God.

The Shi'ite gnostic Seyyed Hayard Amuli in his *Asrar al-Shari'ah* (*Mysteries of the Shariah*) 3:9 II gives the following interpretation of the incident involving Mary's fast of silence and Jesus' speech in his cradle: ". . . abstaining from outward speech effects an inward speaking

that is a language of the inward soul. Therefore when Maryam remains silent with her tongue, ‘Isa utters words of manifest meaning in his cradle, claiming to be the caliph of the Merciful.’ When we join Wisdom to the entity of the Holy Spirit and the person of Mary, we arrive at a triadic confluence of the *umm al-kitab*. Thus Wisdom 10:21 ascribes the miraculous speech of infants to the agency of Lady Wisdom: “For Wisdom opened the mouth of the dumb, and made the tongues of infants eloquent.” Islamic exegesis can therefore conclude that the triadic configuration of Wisdom, Mary, and the sacred spirit opened Jesus’ mouth in his cradle.

To end at the beginning, that is, in Judaism, we recall the alternation between Word and Silence in Psalm 19:

3 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night revealeth knowledge;
4 There is no speech, there are no words, neither is their voice heard.

We have here a paradoxically silent speech exchanged between the personifications of Day and Night. The passage has in mind the Genesis 1 creation account, specifically 1:5: “And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.” This precedes the creation of the sun on the fourth day in Genesis 1:14. The Day and Night in Psalm 19:3 and Genesis 1:5 refer to the primordial light and darkness, which have nothing to do with an as-yet non-existent sun. Day refers to Genesis 1:3-4’s “light,” while Night refers to Genesis 1:2’s primordial darkness over the face of the watery abyss.

Psalm 19:5-7 introduces the personified Sun, who emerges from his marriage chamber. We are not told explicitly just who the implied bride of the Sun may be. The answer is naturally implied, however, by the sudden transition in verses 8-10 of the praises of the Torah. Here we must be dealing with the personified Lady Torah. This is supported by the allusions to Proverbs 8’s speech by Lady Wisdom that we encounter throughout Psalm 19:8-10. Consequently, the Sun’s bride must be Lady Torah.

There are some subtle hints in the Hebrew text of Psalm 19 that suggest the Sun is to be thought of as a symbol of the solar God. First we notice that Psalm 19:1 is a superscription containing 14 letters in Hebrew, “For the Leader. A Psalm of David.” The letter-total of 14 hints at the numerical value of the Hebrew name for David ($D=4 + W=6 + D=4 = 14$). Counting the superscription one discovers that Psalm 19’s letters 30 and 31 are v. 1’s divine name ‘El, “God,” whose Hebrew numerical value is 31. Not counting the superscription, v. 5’s “Sun” is Psalm 19’s word 31. Next we consider v. 5’s word *lashemesh*, “for the Sun.” The first letter (*lamed*) of *lashemesh* and the first letter (*tav*) of v. 8’s first word *torat*, Torah, span 86 letters. 86 accords with the numerical value of the Hebrew divine name ‘Elohim, of which ‘El is a short-form. If we begin counting after v. 5’s *leshemesh*, then there are 86 letters to v. 8’s second word, the divine name YHWH. These numerical interconnections subtly hint symbolically at the divine nature of the Sun and at the spousal relationship between the solar God (that is, the Sun as symbol of God) and Lady Torah.

17. Mary and the Divine Mercy

The name Miriam in Hebrew means “bitterness.” This is not to overlook the fact that Miriam was originally an Egyptian name of unknown meaning. Nevertheless, traditionally Miriam’s name in Jewish sources has been symbolically linked to the bitterness of Egyptian bondage (so Rashi). From a Christian perspective, Jesus’ mother Mary cannot but have participated in the “bitterness” of the boundaries of earthly contingency. Even the status she enjoys in Paradise according to Christian belief is that of a creature. The “bitterness” of finiteness must therefore somehow typify even her sacred symbolism. Yet for Christians Mary simultaneously embodies the divine peace, which being uncreated transforms the limitative horizon of bitterness into a gate opening out onto the infinity of the celestial peace. Moving now to Islamic thought, according to Seyyed Haydar Amuli in his *Asrar al-Shari’ah (Mysteries of the Shariah)* 3:6, the peace Muslims wish upon the saints constitutes “an overflow of God emanating and preserving from the world of holiness.” This interplay between the terrestrial and celestial dimensions of Maryam is indicated by the “conjunction” within her of the reception of peace (on account of her creaturely status with its attendant “bitterness”) and the simultaneous presence of the divine names “the Merciful” and “the Compassionate” which embrace her and “consume” her finiteness in the divine infinity.

The aspect of infinity in Mary alludes to her status as earthly manifestation of the celestial *umm al-kitab*, which conceptually corresponds to the Jewish entity Lady Wisdom. This in turn indicates that the bitterness and suffering which Mary endured in history could not have been for herself alone, but for the sake of humanity, for whom she is, according to Catholic theology, “Co-redemptrix.” This is already indicated in the words of Simeon to Mary: “And thine own soul a sword shall pierce that the thoughts of all hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:35). This verse immediately follows Simeon’s prophecy of the sufferings of Jesus, indicating a sort of equivalence between the sufferings of mother and son. According to Christian doctrine, at the foot of the cross, Mary’s sufferings were neither for herself nor for her own sake, but she wept in labor to give birth to the ascended Christ. Accordingly, Acts 13:33 applies Psalm 2:7 to Jesus’ resurrection: “Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee.”

This same theme of Mary laboring to give birth to the ascended Jesus is described in Revelation 12:2, 5: “And being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered.¹⁸⁴ And she brought forth a man child . . . and her son was taken up to God, and to his throne.”¹⁸⁵ This birth is not the nativity, but the ascension of Jesus. Naturally the imagery employed

¹⁸⁴ John 16:21, which appears to refer to the coming of the spirit on Pentecost, employs language that seems to allude to Mary: “A woman, when she is in labor, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.” The Johannine thematic points of contact in this verse with Revelation 12:2 and Qur’an *sura* 19:22-23 are noteworthy.

¹⁸⁵ This same mystery of Mary’s travail is present in John 16:21: “A woman, when she is in labor, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.” Here it is a matter of giving birth to the eschatological reign of peace (*salam*, and by extension, Islam), or to the Age of the Paraclete. The stresses in nature which are signs of the impending birth of the reign of peace are presented in

is that of nativity, which is related in the Qur'an as follows: "And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm-tree. She said: Oh, would that I had died ere this and had become a thing of naught, forgotten" (*sura* 19:23). Yet these sufferings are again not for herself, but for the sake of humanity. In herself, according to Catholic dogma, she did not suffer the pangs of childbirth. This is consonant with the three doctrines of her own immaculate conception, of Jesus' virginal conception, and of Jesus' virginal birth. The early second-century Syriac *Odes of Solomon* 19:8 is likely the earliest explicit witness to this tradition: "And she was in travail and bore a son, yet without pain. . . ."

From a sufic perspective, one can see in *sura* 19:23 an allusion to Mary's yearning for the passive state and active station of *fana*, the mystical extinction of the illusory ego. Yet Mary had always embodied the state of *fana*, so that *sura* 19:23 is presented as an example for the sake of humanity, for Mary did not stand in need of that which she realized by and in her own nature. Mary's "bitterness" is a "redemptive" suffering for the sake of the world's enlightenment. It is in this sense that we must understand the essential positive significance of the lexically "negative" Hebrew name Miriam, "bitterness" when applied to Mary. Her name brings to mind the world's bitterness which her own state of celestial sweetness cancels. Such is the Christian understanding.

Returning to Islamic thought, the names *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim*, which open the Qur'an, are spiritually joined and esoterically allude to the mystery of Maryam.¹⁸⁶ In addition to the fact that the two divine names *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim* possess certain phonetic resonances with the name Maryam, we note here the presence of what might be called the sacred mother's implicate presence in the *Fatiha*. She inheres therein as matrix of divine silence (*silentium Dei*). This is anagogically consonant with her being a manifestation on the earthly plane of the celestial *umm al-kitab*. The Mother of the Book is to be viewed here as corresponding with the preexistent Lady Wisdom of the Jewish scriptures (Proverbs 8; Sirach 24; Baruch 3-4; Wisdom 7). From this angle of vision, it is the secret, concealed presence in the *Fatiha* of Maryam, who is a theophany of the supernal *umm al-kitab*, which justifies the Prophet's designation of the *Fatiha* as the "Mother of the Book." Viewed in this light, the entire Qur'anic revelation is permeated with the revelation of the Maryaman mystery of simultaneous creaturely humility and plenary divine blessing. The anagogical association of the divine names *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim* with Maryam recalls the symbolic application of various divine names to imam 'Ali in Shi'ite gnosis, as the following typical *hadith* of 'Ali illustrates: "I am God's Face . . . God's hand; I am the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward."

The celestial aspect of Maryam implies that although she is historically associated with exile in bitterness, she nevertheless manifests the divine peace, *salam*. Indeed, we could say that Maryam is an expression of the very peace which Muslims call down upon her. She is an exemplary model of the capacity for and affinity with the divine peace which all creatures possess primordially, given

Matthew 24's eschatological discourse as labor pains: "Now all these are the beginnings of sorrows" (verse 8).

¹⁸⁶ One could not ask for any more precise Latin equivalents to the two principle Qur'anic Arabic divine Names for plenary Mercy and Compassion than the two following Latin superlative adjectival Marian invocations: *Mater Misericordissima, Mater clementissima!*—"Mother Most Merciful, Mother Most Compassionate!" One might also refer to verse 7 of the *Odes of Solomon* 19, where it is said of Mary: "And thus did the Virgin become a Mother with abundant mercies."

the origin of creation in the Creator, who is peace as such. As Fatima, according to Shi'ite gnosis, is the night which in *sura al-Qadr* is designated peace, so Maryam is likewise this same peace. As mother of all Prophets, according to Sufi parlance, her presence is the very fragrance of celestial peace, for she, like Fatima the exalted Lady of Light, is a manifestation on the earthly plane of the preexistent supernal *umm al-kitab*.

To associate anagogically the divine names *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim* with Maryam is symbolically fitting in an Islamic context, for as is well known, these two divine names are etymologically related to the Arabic word for “womb,” and thus refer to the “feminine” divine realities. Sahih Bukhari (Vol. 8, Book 73, numbers 17-18) records that Muhammad said: “The word ‘womb’ (*al-rahm*) is derived from ‘*al-Rahman*.’” A *hadith qudsi* reads: “I am *al-Rahman* and the womb’s name I derived from my name.” A feminine celestial reality is most fittingly expressed on the earthly plane in and by a feminine vessel. The plenary mercy and compassion of a mother best represent and unveil the divine mercy and compassion. Maryam, like Fatima, is the embodiment and revelation of the divine mercy and compassion. In *sura Maryam* the divine name *al-Rahman* occurs more times than in any other *sura*. This indicates that Maryam is a plenary theophany of the divine mercy. If Maryam is the manifestation of plenary mercy, then *sura al-Rahman* must be a Maryaman revelation. This is in fact confirmed in a certain sense by Islamic traditions that call *sura al-Rahman* “the Bride of the Qur’an.”

Sura 55, al-Rahman, The Merciful, is intimately related to Maryam. *Sura 55* contains 31 instances of the refrain “What is it, of the favors [mercies, *alai*] of your Lord, that ye deny (*tukadhibani*)?” This refrain is anticipated in *sura 53:55*, “What is it, of the favors of your Lord, that ye doubt (*tatamara*)?” It seems intentional that this anticipation of *sura 55* occurs precisely in *aya 55* of *sura 53*. Moreover, *sura 54* has a total of 55 *ayat*. With its 31 refrains, *sura 55* brings to mind Psalm 136 with its 27 refrains of the theologically equivalent Hebrew phrase: “For the mercy of the LORD endureth forever.” The Hebrew refrain calls to mind the very title of *sura al-Rahman*. The two texts furthermore share various themes and images, such as the sun, moon, and stars (Psalm 136:7-9; *sura 55:5-6*).

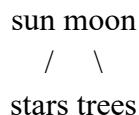
Sura al-Rahman is the second “Maryaman” *sura*. In the first, *sura Maryam*, the divine name *al-Rahman* occurs more times than in any other *sura*. As discussed above, a *hadith qudsi* proclaims that the Arabic word for “womb,” *al-rahm*, is related to the divine name *al-Rahman*. Maryam can be anagogically understood as the very “womb” of the divine mercy. She is the *tajalli* (theophany) and manifestation of mercy. Maryam is the *umm al-kitab* on a “personal” plane, just as the Qur'an, typified by the *Fatiha*, is called the *umm al-kitab* on the level of inliteration. The supernal *umm al-kitab* remains on the level of pre-inliteration the archetypal Book. Therefore, the *basmala*, which opens the *suras* of the Qur'an, bestows upon the entire Qur'an a Maryaman fragrance, a sacred dimension which in Islam is Maryam herself.

Sura 55:1-2: “The Merciful has made known the Qur'an.” The *umm* has revealed the *kitab*, the Word, the *amr*. *Aya 3*: “He hath created man”—by means of the *umm al-kitab*, the divine Wisdom and Word. *Aya 4*: “He [the Merciful] hath taught him utterance.” Humanity reflects the *kitab*. *Aya 5*: “The sun and moon are made punctual.” The sun alludes anagogically to the luminous *umm* (recall that “sun” in Arabic is grammatically feminine). The moon is correspondingly the *kitab*, for the latter is “derived” from the *umm*, being a reflection of the plenary mother who contains all possibility. “Punctual”—for the two are harmoniously joined as *umm* and *kitab*. *Aya 6*: “The stars and the trees adore.” The stars are other suns (according to a *hadith* of ‘Ali, the stars are

the members of the *ahlul bayt*). The trees stand parallel to the *kitab*; they are the individual words (cf. *kalima*) of the plenary Word (*amr*). Compare Revelation 12:1ff., where the cosmic woman is clothed with the sun, with a crown of twelve stars, and the moon under her feet. The sun in one sense is Abraham, the moon Sarah, or in an Islamic setting, Hagar.¹⁸⁷ *Aya 6*'s trees adore; we recall here the five trees of Paradise (cf. the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas* 19), which in the Islamic Ismaili gnostic text Umm al-Kitab come to allegorically symbolize the *ahlul bayt*, the five members of the House of Muhammad thought of as individual emanations of the *kitab*.

Sura 55:17: “Lord of the two Easts, and Lord of the two Wests.” Phrased differently, we have here two sunrises and two sunsets (cf. the *al-Qadr sura*). God is Lord of the two days and of the two nights. Symbolically, the two days are Muhammad and ‘Isa, while the two nights are Maryam and Fatima. But because the *umm* and *kitab* are joined in divine harmony, that is, in *salam*, the alternating night-day symbolism is interchangeable. One may thus speak on the one hand of the luminous night of Wisdom. On the other hand, the light of the Logos entails a simultaneous dimension of veiling or darkening. This is because every revelation takes place on the plane of contingency, and thus participates in limitative, or darkening, sensible forms. The night-day symbolism is also interchangeable given that in various Semitic languages the sun is grammatically feminine, so that Maryam can symbolically be simultaneously night and day. Night and day, after all, are merely natural alternations of the movement of earth and sun, passive and active cosmic events.

The question arises: What is the connection between the stars and trees in *sura 55 aya 6*? The stars are associated with the shade of night, just as trees are associated, especially in a desert, with the shade of day, a prefiguration of the coolness of night. Stars and trees thus constitute respectively direct and indirect symbols of the shade of night. Putting together *ayat 5* and *6* we arrive at the following parallelism:



The relation between sun and stars is self-evident. The moon is symbolically the shadow of the sun; likewise, the trees' shadows are cast by the light of the moon. In another sense, trees are the moon of the day, foretelling the night's advent.

In conclusion, the identification of *sura al-Rahman* as a Maryaman revelation is supported by the previously mentioned fact that traditionally this *sura* has been called “the Bride of the Qur'an.” We recall further, in passing, that the Algerian Sufi Shaykh al-‘Alawi (1869-1934) ceased memorizing the Qur'an after he had mastered *sura al-Rahman*.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps this was all that was necessary for the perfection of his soul.

¹⁸⁷ According to Imam Sadiq commenting on *sura al-Shams* ayat 1-4, the sun is the Prophet and the moon is ‘Ali.

¹⁸⁸ See Martin Lings, A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-‘Alawi, p. 48.

18. Sura 97 The Night of *Qadr*

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

- 1 Verily we sent him down upon the night of majesty.
- 2 And what is there that could explain to you the night of majesty?
- 3 The night of majesty is better than a thousand months!
- 4 The angels descend, and the spirit enters into her, by leave of their Lord, with the fullness of the Word.
- 5 Peace is she until the day dawns.

The divine One is utterly merciful in nature, utterly compassionate in action. *Sura al-Qadr* concerns principally the descent of the Qur'an through the angel Gabriel on the night of *Qadr*, which may be translated as "majesty."¹⁸⁹ The night of *Qadr* alludes directly to the descent of the Qur'an via Gabriel and indirectly to the descent of the spirit to Mary during the annunciation and the nativity of Jesus. We would explain the Marian interpretation of this *sura* as follows. "Him" in verse 1 refers indirectly to Gabriel, and principally to the Qur'an, or in Christian language, the Logos. The descent of the angels (plural) agrees with the Qur'anic account of the annunciation to Mary, which fluctuates between the singular angel Gabriel and the plural form "angels." *Sura* 3:42 and 45 refer to the angels of the annunciation in the plural: "And when the angels said: 'O Mary! Lo! God hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above all the women of creation.' and remember when the angels said: 'O Mary! Lo! God giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from him, whose name is the messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and in the world to come, and one of those brought near unto God.'" Gabriel as the singular angel of the annunciation appears in *sura* 19:17: "Then we sent unto her our spirit and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man."

We now return to *sura* 97. Regarding the phrase, "the spirit enters into her," while "her" in the Arabic text may refer to the "night" upon, or "in" which the spirit descended, a Marian allusion is also allowed.¹⁹⁰ "The spirit enters into her" reminds one of the Qur'anic statement that God breathed of his spirit into Mary in order to form Jesus in her womb (*sura* 66:12). Mary as symbol of the inscrutability of the divine decree is metaphorically represented as the dark night; a similar Shi'ite exegesis sees the night as Fatima.

"Peace is she until the day dawns." The standard English translations do not do justice to the Arabic text in that they suppress the feminine pronoun *hiya*, as if the verse were merely saying that "there is peace in the night until dawn," or that "the night was peaceful until dawn." "She" certainly

¹⁸⁹ As explained previously in this monograph, the term *qadr* according to standard lexica means "weight," "degree," "quantity," "power," "glory." "Glory" in this context means "full of weight." As Schedl writes: "Certainly in this night with the descent of the Qur'an the destiny of many humans was determined, but not fate and determination are celebrated here, but rather the glory of this night." See Claus Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus*, p. 112.

¹⁹⁰ See the exegesis of *sura al-Qadr* in Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1999), pp. 190ff. and 203.

refers back to the “night,” but the pronoun also possesses a Marian connotation. Mary is peace, for she embodies and reflects that peace, *salam*, which is both the etymological and the theological root of “submission,” that is, of Islam. In the context of the annunciation, after Gabriel presents reasonable evidence of the truth inherent in his claim to Mary that she shall bear a son, she then fully submits “outwardly,” like the angels mentioned in *sura al-Qadr*, to the divine decree, the Word. In Mary there thus is a harmony (i.e. peace) established between reason and faith, a peaceful harmony between the divine and human.

The Church, in an accommodated sense, applies Wisdom 18:14-15a to the annunciation and the nativity: “For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, thy almighty Word leapt down from heaven from thy royal throne.” (These verses are the source of the popular Christmas carol, “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear”). That the passage in Wisdom at the historical level of interpretation has reference to the descent of the Logos in order to judge humanity rather than to a peaceful descent of blessing, does not mean that the verses bear no relation to Mary for Christian exegetes. Luke 2:34-35 indicates that both the infant Jesus and his mother are signs of eschatological judgment and conflict: “Behold, this infant is set for either the fall, or for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be assailed. and a sword shall pierce even you, that the thoughts of many may be exposed.”

The night is sacred, for in it the descent of the Word is accomplished. the night is peaceful until the break of dawn. Yet after dawn breaks, not only is the promise of illumination realized, but judgment also looms on the horizon of history. The Lucan scenario of the descent of the Word and the apocalyptic polarization this brings with reference to both Jesus and Mary, are both paralleled also in the Prophet of Islam. He receives the Word, the Qur'an, and it leads not only to acceptance and blessing, but also to denial and conflict. The judgment delivered by the Word in Wisdom 18:14-16, appears in an Islamic setting as eminently “Muhammadan” in both divinely sublime and harsh aspects:

14 For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course,
15 thy almighty Word leapt down from heaven from thy royal throne, as a fierce conqueror
into the midst of the land of destruction,
16 with a sharp sword carrying thy unfeigned commandment. And he stood and filled all
things with death, and standing on the earth reached even to heaven.

As the Word, according to Wisdom 18, judged the Egyptians for their social injustices committed against the disenfranchised Hebrew slaves, so Muhammad's central prophetic message in the social sphere was a demand to treat the poor, children, orphans, and widows with dignity, respect, and to bestow upon them concrete social assistance. This “Muhammadan” dimension of Mary, which agrees eminently with the Lucan model, is often overlooked by both Muslims and Christians, but it is no less an element of the Marian story than the attributes of mercy and kindness so rightly associated with her. But this de-emphasis of Marian “harshness” is understandable, for in Christian thought the Marian mercy represents her very essence, whereas the elements of division and conflict, while being unavoidable are nevertheless but “extrinsic” consequences which manifest themselves on the historical plane as well as in the eschaton.

According to *sura al-Qadr*, God sent down the plenary inliteration of the Word (*amr*), in the form of the *kitab* on the night of majesty (*qadr*). If the *kitab* is sent down, that on which, or into

which, it is sent down must be the *umm al-kitab*, the Mother of the Book. Thus the night of majesty may be called the Mother of Majesty, *umm al-qadr*. The *umm al-kitab*'s majestic substance is the luminous divine Wisdom. The mid-first-century CE Jewish text Wisdom 7:26 celebrates the light of Lady Wisdom, the entity who is the ultimate source of the Qur'anic *umm al-kitab*: "For she is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of his goodness."

On one level, *sura al-Qadr*'s night of majesty or glory hints at the night of Jesus the Word's nativity, of which Luke records that during it the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest." As the *kitab* descended on the night of majesty, so the spirit, according to Muslim belief, descended upon Mary as she conceived and then later brought forth Jesus, the Word and spirit of God. Mary dwelt in the Temple, for she becomes a symbol of the Temple of the Lord, give, that she houses the very Word and spirit of God, of which she herself is a plenary theophany (*tajalli*) in feminine modality.

When the celestial *kitab* enters the plane of contingency, eternity pierces through the veils of temporality. Time is thereby relativized, and consequently the night of majesty is better than a thousand months, both qualitatively and quantitatively, producing a sacred time dilation. Psalm 84:11: "For better is one day in thy temple above thousands." The *kitab* descends upon the *umm*, and therefore the night of descent exceeds a thousand months. On this night the angels descended and sang of God's majesty and glory, which is the night of the union of the mother and the Word, which on a plenary level is the Book. The *umm al-kitab* is ultimately a celestial manifestation, or emanation, of the Holy Spirit. At the annunciation, the celestial manifestation of the spirit and the earthly human manifestation of the spirit meet as Gabriel and Mary. These two manifestations of the spirit meet on account of their mysterious affinity, originating as they do from the same supernal matrix.

The angels and the spirit descended with the *amr*, the Word, in all its fullness, which is the *kitab*. The *kitab* is thus brought down in plenary mode on the night of majesty. The night is the *umm al-kitab*, and the Mother of the Book is salvation in its modality of peace (*salam*), the peace of divine silence, of sacred concealment. And this silence is the realm of the concealed archetypes, the suprasensible forms. Islamic theosophy accordingly specifies that the *umm al-kitab* also denotes the realm of the ideal forms. Silence reigns until the Word speaks as the Book, and the lunar *umm* alternates with the solar *kitab*. Yet because the *kitab* issues forth from the mother, she participates equally in the solar aspect. Therefore Wisdom 7:26 denominates Lady Wisdom as "the brightness of eternal light."

Sura al-Qadr thus possesses multiple exegetical depths. The spirit descends with the Qur'an in the night of majesty, the night which is Fatima. Mary also represents a theophany of the night, of the *umm al-kitab*. The *sura*'s Marian application suggests that Jesus, the Word and spirit of God, entered into the night, into the *umm*, who is Mary as embodiment of the night, which is the *silentium Dei*. Therefore, if according to Shi'ite gnosis, Fatima is the confluence of the lights of esoterism and exoterism, then so is Mary the "singularity point" which embodies the "event horizon" where the silent, concealed Word of eternity is joined with the spoken words of God revealed in temporality.

Whereas *sura* 97 speaks of the angels and the spirit descending on a night better than a thousand months, *sura* 70:1-4 informs us of the angels and the spirit who ascend on the day of judgment, a day that will last 50,000 years: "A questioner questioned concerning the doom about to fall upon the disbelievers, which none can avert, from God, the lord of the ways of ascent. The

angels and the spirit ascend unto him in a day the measure whereof is fifty thousand years.” Just as *sura* 97 in its Marian application elucidates the blessedness and joy of the annunciation, so in contrast, *sura* 70 announces the ominous judgment of the apocalyptic day.

That the day of judgment lasts 50,000 years indicates that though the divine punishment will be exacting, it will not be eternal in the strict sense of the word. The Fire of Wrath will be quenched by the mercy of God which predominates over the attributes of Wrath and Justice. This is intimated to us by virtue of *sura* 70’s naming of God, in the midst of the proclamation of judgment, as the Lord of the Ways of Ascent. The angels and spirit ascend on the day of judgment. They ascend to God in contrast to the descent of sinners to hell. That God is the Lord of the Ways of Ascent furthermore teaches us that those who are subject to the “50,000 years” of the Fire will by degrees of purification ascend unto God, that is, achieve by grace the beatific vision effected by union with the divine Essence. According to a *hadith qudsi*, the divine proclamation “My mercy hath precedence over my Wrath” is inscribed as an eternal witness upon the very throne of God. And the Qur’anic Throne Verse, by declaring the divine throne to be co-extensive with the cosmos, teaches humanity that the sway of the divine mercy is ultimately universal and unlimited:

His throne doth extend
Over the heavens
And the earth.
Sura 2:255

When God created the world, he recorded in his Book what is also written upon the throne:
“Verily, my mercy prevails over my wrath.”
Hadith Qudsi

May it be Thy will that Thy mercy may suppress Thy anger and Thy mercy may prevail over Thy other attributes, so that Thou mayest deal with Thy children according to the attribute of mercy and mayest, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice!
Babylonian Talmud *Berachot* 7a (Soncino translation)

And mercy exalteth itself above judgment.
Epistle of James 2:13

19. The Light Verse: Esoteric Interpretations

God is the light of the heavens and earth; the similitude of his light is as a niche in a wall, wherein a lamp is placed, and the lamp enclosed in a case of glass; the glass appears as it were a shining star. It is lighted with the oil of a blessed tree, an olive neither of the east, nor of the west; it wanteth little but that the oil thereof would give light, although no fire touched it. This is light added unto light; God will direct unto his light whom he pleaseth. God propoundeth parables unto men; for God knoweth all things.

Sura 24:35

In the Qur'an, Jesus is associated with the east, Moses with the west. The Light Verse speaks of the divine light as being neither of the east nor of the west, leading some commentators to see in this *aya* a "limitative" allusion to these two major Prophets. Before addressing this view, we note that the verse does not exclude the directions of north and south from the divine light. The north symbolizes the upper heavens, while the south symbolizes the lower earth, in agreement with the opening of the Light Verse: "God is the light of the heavens and the earth." North denotes celestial light; south denotes "terrestrial" light. Since all the prophets, which would by Qur'anic definition include Moses and Jesus, bring the divine light of guidance to humanity, and thus to earth, the divine light here referred to cannot exclude Jesus and Moses. Therefore, the symbolic association of these two prophets with the east and west should not be pressed too literally in this context, as if silence regarding the east and west suggested an exclusion from the divine light of two of the most important of the Qur'anic messengers of the light of divine guidance.

The exoteric exegesis that identifies the light of *aya Al-Nur* as the non-local *Nur Muhammadi* is justified from a certain perspective. From the standpoint of essentiality, however, neither Muhammad nor any other Prophet can be identified with the divine light as such. Moreover, the light under discussion, as we have observed, is not actually non-local, given that the verse does not explicitly exclude the northern and southern directions. Additionally, the light is "of the heavens and the earth," and therefore its localization is indeed cosmic in scope. That is, it is entirely local, spatial.

Regarding Jesus, his historical mission was admittedly to Israel only, but nevertheless his person and mission according to the Qur'an are a revelation for all of mankind, indeed, for the entire universe (*sura* 19:21). This is this by virtue of his status as the seal of the saints. Similarly, Mary as mother of the Prophets must also be a universal sign, by no means restricted in sacred significance to her people Israel alone. According to Islamic doctrine, Muhammad as seal of the Prophets confirms, synthesizes, and recapitulates the message/s of Moses and Jesus. In so doing this justifies the exoteric association of the Light Verse with the *Nur Muhammadi*. But from an esoteric point of view, this association must be not in an oppositional sense over against the previous Prophets, but in an integrative synthesizing sense that incorporates the universal company of the Prophets, the seal of whom is Muhammad according to Muslim belief.

If one associates the light with Muhammad, then the phrase "light upon light" could at one level signify the five members of the House of Muhammad. The Qur'an states that for the faithful, the wives of the Prophet are closer to them than they are to their own soul. As a correlate, we could

conclude that if such is true of his wives, who are not his own flesh and blood biologically, then his Family who are his own flesh and blood, above all Fatima, are the very soul of the faithful. This must mean that the faithful are the spiritual descendants and children of Fatima as preexistent Lady of Light who according to Shi'ite esoteric ideas dwelt around the divine throne in pre-eternity.

Fatima's title Lady of Light is naturally associated with the Light Verse. God is the light of the heavens and the earth, and Fatima is the feminine dimension of the divine light. Symbolically viewed, Fatima, whose esoteric name means 'creator', 'maker', is a manifestation of the divine Wisdom, *hikma*, which coincides with the *umm al-kitab*, the Mother of the Book, i.e., the mother of the *amr*, of the creative Word of Command. This calls to mind how Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24 portray preexistent Lady Wisdom as the feminine witness to God's creative activity. Fatima, as well as Mary who, as Louis Massignon observed, esoterically corresponds to the Prophet's daughter,¹⁹¹ must therefore represent pre- eternal emanations of the *umm al-kitab*. They are both manifestations of Lady Hikma on the earthly plane of existence.

Diversity of person applies to the sensible manifestation of the suprasensible archetype Lady Wisdom, while the prototype in itself is unitive at the celestial level. Proverbs 3 states that Wisdom is the tree of life, and according to a well-known *hadith*, Muhammad ate from the Tree of Beatitude (*tuba*) during a heavenly ascent, and from this fruit Fatima was conceived. Similarly, the tree of life is associated with Mary in Christian symbolism. Fatima and Mary are mutual manifestations of celestial Wisdom on the earthly plane. In Jewish interpretation the tree of life is the Torah, the earthly manifestation of Lady Wisdom.

"God is the light of the heavens and the earth." The word "is" implies emanation of the cosmos. But inasmuch as the Light Verse excludes the horizontal dimension of east-west, but not the vertical relationship of north-south, the transcendence of the Creator is stressed, thus implying *creatio ex nihilo*. The verse thus integrates both models, emanation and creation, both of which require a Prime Mover. From another angle, the Light Verse's exclusion of the east-west suggests to us that the divine light is not bound within the confines of the oscillation or vicissitudes of day and night, or of the eastern sunrise and western sunset, both of which denote the passage of time. But the divine light, if it is free from the bounds of time, must also be free from the limits of space, assuming a unitive concept of spacetime. The velocity of contingent light implies both space and time, or better, spacetime, and the divine light is bound by neither dimension of this unitive spacetime. However, as we have previously established, the divine light is also spatial and local. The divine light is therefore both transcendent and embedded throughout the contingent cosmos.

The divine light is neither of the east nor west; the east-west are singled out because they denote the light of sunrise (east) and sunset (west). There is no light (sunlight) associated with north or south, so accordingly there is no need to negate these explicitly in an exegesis of the Light Verse. East and west can therefore signify the totality of created light, thus suggesting that the divine light, which God is, is not to be simplistically identified with the created light. East and west have to do with the totality of light more than with its local or non-local nature. The light of God is not the light of sunrise or sunset, but though it is not to be identified with the created light, because God is light and the creator of terrestrial light, the divine light is the source of the cosmic light and "shines" transparently through it.

¹⁹¹ See Louis Massignon, *Parole donné* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1970).

As far as created light is concerned, its totality on earth is indicated by the directions east and west. Therefore, in a certain sense, the two cardinal directions could stand for the total “local” field or parameters of light, so that they would, after all, indicate the non-local nature of the divine light. The local must originate from the divine, celestial “non-local” sphere, so that space emerges from a spaceless “point.” This point is the diacritical point (*dagesh*) within the *beth* which is the first letter of the Torah. From this interior *dagesh* emanates the two dots (*shiva*) beneath this letter *beth*.

We now arrive at three categories of light: divine light (unmanifest); celestial light (suprasensible form); and terrestrial or cosmic light (sensible form). The second and third typologies are manifest in the realm of contingency. *Lux prima materia est*; all things are light existing at different velocities or levels of “resonance.” In this context, *lux* denotes energy.

“God is the light of heaven and earth.” God is the source of the cosmic light. There is a single light that pervades the multiplicity of creation. The One is thus related to the many. The multiplicity of creation issues forth from the One. The Qur'an repeatedly proclaims that all things are from God, and all will return to God.

In its aspects of emanation or creation, the divine light is multifaceted and indeed multiple. The first line of the Light Verse therefore refers to “heaven and earth,” denoting the multiplicity that issues forth from the luminous divine One. The verse proceeds to describe the multiple “levels” or unfoldings of the single divine light. According to the verse these unfoldings entail the following progressive constellation of unveilings, which all lead up to and then follow from the central image of oil:

Niche > Glass Case > Lamp-Star > OIL < Lamp-Star < Glass Case < Niche

We have here four “layers” that constitute the unitary divine light. What are these various layers but figures for the stages of divine emanation, or *sefirot* as the Jewish Kabbalah would call them? “Niche in a wall”; the wall is the gulf, the barrier that separates (and also bridges) the Uncreated from the created. In this wall is found a niche, an enclosure that makes possible the emergence of the One into multiplicity. “Light upon light”; if God is light, and if there is in this luminous state a differentiated “light upon light,” then there must be a certain continuity between the One and differentiated multiplicity. “Light upon light” clearly denotes a multi-layered light, a “multiplication” or better, a variegated unfolding of light.

A glass case is set in the niche of emanation. The glass denotes transparency, luminosity, and reflection. The divine luminosity ensures that the divine is transparent and revealed to and in the multiple. As a consequence, this multiplicity, this creation, reflects the divine, so that humanity is the image of God, as a *hadith* of the Prophet states: “God created humanity in his image.”

The glass appears as a shining star, not as the bright sun, but as a more distant, faint, and dim luminosity. This confirms that the One and the many are not simply identical. Hindu thought similarly stresses that there is not only a continuity but also a divide between *atman* and the cosmos. Yet the fact that as one approaches them, the stars are actually seen to be just as luminous as our own sun, relativizes their distant aspect of faintness by unveiling their true local brilliance. This in turn alludes to the continuity between the One and the many.

The lamp's luminosity is derived from the enclosed olive oil. This oil gives off a faint light even before it is lit with fire, that is, this oil has light as a latent and immanent quality. The oil's

light comes not only from an “extrinsic” fire, but also from an immanent and intrinsic fire, namely, the divine light. To understand this oil, we must bear in mind that it is from a “blessed olive tree neither of east nor west.” That is, the tree is coterminous or coextensive with heaven and earth, with the entire cosmos, reminiscent of the throne of God as portrayed in the Qur’anic Throne Verse. In other words, this olive tree is what is known as the World Tree, or Cosmic Tree. It is a symbol, among other things, of the cosmos itself.

The oil of this Qur’anic World Tree possesses an immanent luminosity. This is the “latent” tendency of the divine towards emanation in the world of multiplicity. The question then arises, what is the “extrinsic,” or “transcendent” fire which is then added to the olive oil to produce the fullness of luminosity? In a Qur’anic context, we would suggest that this flame is the divine direction, or guidance, mentioned in the last lines of the Light Verse. In other words, it is the Prophetic light. The divine light is, after all, a light which illuminates the Prophet, and this is the *Nur Muhammadi*. It is a universal light, for God has guided all peoples through Prophets. In this context, “light” also bears a reference to the light of the divine intellect, for by the Prophetic guidance, the human *intellectus* is illuminated by divine intellection. Humanity thus reflects the divine, in accordance with the *hadith*: “Know thyself, and then thou shalt know God.”

In the *Gospel of Thomas* logion 77 Jesus says he is the light, the all. Sufis similarly identify the primordial light with the *Nur Muhammadi*, which is the Prophetic light transmitted from Adam down through the line of the Prophets. The *Nur Muhammadi* is the light of God expressed in Muhammadan mode. Yet according to Islamic teaching, all the Prophets share in the divine light. The Prophet of Islam is a created man, yet the divine light of which he is a theophanic manifestation, is, as a divine attribute, uncreated, at least according to some Islamic opinions. The Word of God, like the divine attribute of light, is uncreated in this model at least. The entry of the Word of God onto the contingent plane involves time and therefore creation, and one returns again to the mutual celestial and earthly aspects of each prophetic messenger of the divine light.

In the Tanakh, the closest parallel to the Qur’anic Light Verse, at least in view of its phrase “light upon light,” would be Psalm 36:10: “For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light do we see light.” Elliot Wolfson cites the following commentary on this Psalter verse from Shalom Dovber Schneersohn (1860–1920):

This is the aspect of the disclosure and the emissions of the light of the infinite, the one who emanates in the worlds of the emanated and created beings, and as it is written ‘In your light the light is seen’ (Psalms 36:10), for through your essential light of the essence of the light of the infinite, the light is seen in the worlds, and it is known that every disclosure of the light is by means of the garments in which the light is garbed and concealed to the point that there can be the aspect of disclosure.¹⁹²

Wolfson then offers his own perceptive interpretation of Schneersohn’s remarks, which will form a fitting closure for this chapter: “The light can be revealed only if it is concealed, which is to say, the truth is exposed through the veil of truth that is the untruth. That the removal of the veil

¹⁹² Elliot R. Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah: Hidden Gnosis and the Path of Poiēsis* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019), pp. 157-158.

results in the unfurling of another veil to be unfurled implies that the enunciation of the secret can never coincide with what is enunciated.”¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, p. 158.

20. Creation in Islamic Mystical Exegesis

According to *sura al-Qadr*, the Qur'an was revealed in the night of majesty. In Shi'ite exegesis, the "night" is Fatima, the Lady of light. She is held to be the pure matrix of receptivity open in the darkness of emptiness to the divine descent. Fatima symbolizes the feminine aspect of the universal intellect, the spirit, and the *via negativa* by which one perceives through contemplation the Face of God.

David in Psalm 36:10 declares, "in thy light shall we see light." The vision of God is the light of humanity, who see by means of *theoria*, the contemplation of the divine intellect. God is the sight by which we see, and in Shi'ite thought his light is Fatima. "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light" (Genesis 1:3), and for Shi'ites this would be allegorically equivalent to the *lux Fatimae*.

The Imams associate the name Fatima with the divine name *al-Fatir*, "the Creator." Accordingly, the mystery of Fatima would be concealed anagogically in *sura 35*, *al-Fatir*. The alternating interplay of Fatima as darkness and light is indicated in *aya 13*: "He maketh the night to pass into the day and he maketh the day to pass into the night." The *aya* continues: "He hath subdued the sun and moon to service. Each runneth unto an appointed term." The sun is the *Nur Muhammadi*; the moon is Imam 'Ali. Each has, according to Shi'ite mystical exegesis, an appointed term, the Muhammadan exoteric domain, and 'Ali's esoteric reign. Both their terms culminate in God, as *aya 18* concludes: "Unto God is the journeying." Similarly, the gold and pearl armlets, and the silk raiment of the Paradise of Eden in *aya 33* correspond to the gold of the Prophet, the pearl-purity of 'Ali, and the silk of Fatima. Through these three, God removes the grief referred to in *aya 34*. In *ayat 34-35*, the triad of forgiveness, bounty, and grace, once again refers in this model to the Prophet, 'Ali, and Fatima. By these three Infallibles, God installs the faithful "in the mansion of eternity" (*aya 35*). *Aya 38*'s phrase "Unseen of heaven and earth" similarly connotes the esoteric essence of Muhammad and 'Ali, and the "secrets of the breasts" relates to Fatima's esoteric essence. *Aya 41* affirms in Shi'ite thinking the infallibility of the *ahlul bayt*, in that it proclaims that the heavens and the earth, or Muhammad and 'Ali, deviate not.

Sura 38 contains similar *ayat* which may be allegorically applied to the *ahlul bayt*. *Aya 10*'s "treasures of mercy" alludes to the household of the Prophet. *Aya 47*: "Lo! We have purified them with a pure thought, remembrance of the home," this home is the household of Muhammad. In *aya 52*, Muhammad is the fruit of Paradise, and 'Ali is its cool drink. *Aya 53* completes the Edenic triad of rewards by alluding to the *houris*, and anagogically these can be understood as refractions of the graces of Fatima.¹⁹⁴ *Aya 53*'s association of Paradise with the *ahlul bayt* finds an echo in the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas* logion 19, which speaks of the five trees of Paradise: "Blessed is he who existed from the beginning, before he existed. if you come to exist as my disciples and if you will hear my words, these stones will be your slaves, for to you belong five trees in paradise which stay green in summer and winter, and their leaves do not fall. he who will know them will not taste of death." The Ismaili gnostic text called *Umm al-Kitab* allegorically considers these five Paradise

¹⁹⁴ According to Shi'ite traditions, Fatima, conceived from the fruit of a heavenly tree of light, was a preexistent *houri* of Paradise who was manifested on the earthly plane as a human.

trees to be Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain. These are the same trees referred to in Imam ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn’s “Whispered Prayer of the Gnostics”: “O my God, grant that we may be found among those within whose breasts are gardens of trees of longing for thee, trees which have taken firm root.”

Sura 38 *aya* 67, “Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them.” The heavens represent Muhammad, while the earth is ‘Ali, and between these two lights is Fatima, who is known as the confluence of the two lights (see also *ayat* 11 and 28). A Shi’ite mystical exegesis would therefore understand Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” as hinting at the creation of Muhammad and ‘Ali. Similarly, in Genesis 1:3, “And God said, Let there be light; and there was light,” Shi’ite mystical thought would see a hint at the light of Fatima. *Aya* 76 informs us that Adam was made by the two hands of God, and in this exegetical model these would be Muhammad and Fatima. The doctrine and mystery of the *ahlul bayt*, the house of Muhammad, are “tremendous tidings” (*aya* 68).

We now approach *sura* 32, *al-Sajdah*, The Prostration.” *Aya* 2, “the lord of the Worlds”; these are the worlds of the Inward and the Outward, of “the invisible and visible” alluded to in *aya* 6. Pertinent here is *sura* 57:3: “He is the First and the last, and the Outward and the Inward; and he is Knower of all things.” The reference to the divine knowledge in *sura* 57:3 is paralleled in *sura* 32:6: “Such is the Knower of the invisible and the visible, the Mighty, the Merciful.” Consider also *sura* 35:38: “Lo! God is the Knower of the Unseen of the heavens and the earth. Lo! He is aware of the secret of (men’s) breasts.” From one perspective, the Outward and Inward are the exoteric and the esoteric domains. From another angle, the Outward is the Prophet as transcendent heavens, while the inward is ‘Ali as immanent earth. According to al-Ghazali, “heaven” can denote “inward vision.” Thus the esoteric inward vision of heaven can also symbolize ‘Ali rather than the Prophet. Of necessity, the inward and outward interpenetrate both Muhammad and ‘Ali, allowing a certain reciprocal fluidity in the symbolism at hand.

Sura 57:3 sets the First and the Last parallel to the Outward and the Inward. The Outward comes before the Inward because Muhammad precedes ‘Ali, for the exoteric must be deepened or pierced and shattered in order that the esoteric may shine through it. The esoteric is nothing but the exoteric intensified and deepened. There is no esoteric without the exoteric. In other words, when one looks more closely at the plain text, when one contemplates the plain or literal sense of a text, it is only then that the esoteric emerges. The esoteric is a modality or mode of the exoteric. Yet another way of understanding this is to recall that esoteric exegesis is often based on a hyper-literal reading of the text. An example from the Zohar would be its hyper-literal reading of Genesis 1:1’s first three words, *Bereishit bara ’Elohim*, “The Beginning created God.” That is, the second *sefira*, Wisdom (Hokhma), created the third *sefira*, Understanding (Bina).

According to *sura* 32:4, God created the heavens and the earth and what is between them. After the mention of the six days of creation, *aya* 5 refers to “a day whereof the measure is a thousand years.” This is paralleled in Rabbinic literature which teaches that the six days of creation represent the six “millennial” periods of earthly history (this has an echo in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 15:4). *Aya* 7, “Who made all things good which he created,” confirms the Genesis 1:10 doctrine, “And God saw that it (creation) was good.” *Aya* 9 says of humanity: “Then the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Again, this accords with Genesis 2:7, “And God breathed into his face the breath of life.” The spirit of life denotes the celestial dimension of humanity, in contrast to the clay, which

represents the terrestrial dimension. However, one must not overlook that in this context the celestial is derived from the earthly. This becomes apparent when we read Genesis 2:6 and 7 together, for it then emerges that v. 7's breath is borrowed from v. 6's mist:

6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.
7 Then the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Since Genesis 2:7's breath or spirit is the divine spirit and therefore we are justified in concluding that it denotes the (earth-based) celestial dimension of humanity. According to *sura al-Qadr*, "The angels and the spirit descend therein. . ." God breathed the spirit into Adam, just as he breathed, according to the Qur'an, into Maryam and Fatima, on the night of *al-Qadr*.

Sura 32 aya 11 teaches that after death "unto your Lord ye will be returned." We have here a reflex of Genesis 3:19, which refers to the body of clay, "for dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return." But the spirit of life is from God and will return to God. The spirit is Wisdom, of whom Fatima is an emanational refraction, as is Mary. Pertinent here is the early Christian apocryphal (esoteric) story about the boy Jesus fashioning birds of clay and breathing the spirit of life into them, which according to the Qur'anic retelling was by leave of God. Again, this denotes the animation of the terrestrial dimension by means of the infusion of the celestial dimension in the mode of the spirit of life. Last to be mentioned in this context is a *hadith* of Enoch (Idris): "Wisdom is the spirit of life."

21. The *Ahlul Bayt* and the Divine Names

According to Shi'ite esoteric ideas, there is no god but God, and Muhammad is his messenger, while 'Ali is God's ally. Further, Fatima is the Confluence of the two lights, while Hasan and Husain are the infallible signs of God. "There is no god but God" indicates that there is no reality except reality, there is nothing but the reality of God, for anything that is not real does not exist. This is the basis of both Islamic monotheism and monism. Anything that "is" must "be" as a refraction, or as a reflection, of God. This is intimated in the following *aya*: "Withersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God" (*sura* 2:115). Based on these considerations, if there is no reality but God, then the realities of each member of the *ahlul bayt* must ultimately refer back to God, in the sense that all cosmic manifestations are reflections of the divine. The Shi'ite statements about Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain are consequently commentaries upon the unfoldings or unveilings of the reality which is God.

The very names of Muhammad, 'Ali, and Fatima are, according to Shi'ite traditions, derived from the divine names "the Praised," "the Exalted" (or "the Most High") and "the Creator" respectively.¹⁹⁵ All three are revelations of the eternal. To be sure, they are not to be identified with the eternal unrevealed, unmanifest divine Essence, but rather as revelations, reflections of what cannot be fully reflected upon the plane of cosmic manifestation.

Muhammad and 'Ali are the two lights, of which Fatima is the Confluence. One might claim that Fatima's light is derived from Muhammad and 'Ali. In one sense this would be correct from a theological perspective. However, by virtue of the dictum that ultimately God is the light of the heavens and the earth (heaven and earth referring allegorically to Muhammad and 'Ali),¹⁹⁶ then Fatima stands on an equal "luminal" plane with her father and husband, thus justifying her title Lady of light. Nor should one overlook the Shi'ite title of Fatima, "Mother of her Father" (*umm abi'ha*).

God is the light of the heavens and the earth, the light of Muhammad and 'Ali, of exoterism and esoterism. These pairings, which also pertain to subject and object, these "opposites" are transcended in and by Fatima, who is the matrix of the *conjunction oppositorum*. The "transcendence," the "ascendance over" the opposites is effected through Fatima's assimilation of the reality of 'Ali as "the Exalted," which can mean "the ascending," or "the transcending." 'Ali as Exalted, the High One, by an inverse or converse anagogical application connotes heaven, rather than earth. In any case, 'Ali's aspect of transcendence-Exaltation is in turn effected through the Paracletic dimension of Muhammad, the Praised One. Transcendence is therefore effected through praise and glorification, such as through the worshipful invocation of the litany of the divine names. The Praise (corresponding to Muhammad) of the divine names leads the gnostic to the

¹⁹⁵ See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esoterism in Islam*, p. 30.

¹⁹⁶ According to Najm Kobra, "heaven" esoterically coincides with the Holy Spirit; see Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. Tr. from the French by Nancy Pearson (New Lebanon, New York: Omega Publications / Shambhala Publications, 1994), pp. 69-70. We in turn add that the Holy Spirit coincides with the Logos. We have heard Persian Muslims figuratively interpret the Qur'anic teaching that God created the heavens and the earth in Truth as referring to the creation of the Messengers in the divine Truth.

transcendence, Exaltedness (corresponding to ‘Ali) over the opposites. This in turn brings about the *unio mystica*, symbolized by the creative matrix which is Fatima (corresponding anagogically to the divine name “the Creator”).

The two different dimensions of the unitary divine light are joined as the single unifying light who is Fatima. In the Lady of light the two dimensions become one, intimating the mystery of the divine Unity. The *afrad*, the solitary ones, the unitary ones, of Islamic mysticism (which has a precedent, *mutatis mutandis*, in the *Gospel of Thomas*’ “unitary ones”) are therefore those who have found the point of singularity known as Fatima. Finally, the realities of Muhammad, ‘Ali, and Fatima issue forth into the dual dimension of Hasan and Husain, who are held to be the infallible signs of God.

Husain embraces the dimension of self-sacrificing martyrdom and of worship of God for no reward, purely out of gratefulness to God. The name Husain is a diminutive form of Hasan, the latter meaning “pleasant,” “goodness,” “handsome.” Both brothers were martyrs, and this suggests that the two brothers represent total surrender and willingness for surrender in the cause of God, the One, and therefore of the mystical unity of the *afrad*, the solitary ones. The sacred dimension of Husain is an emanation of Hasan, indicated by the derivation of the former name from the latter. The differentiation between the two is that Hasan’s was an esoteric, hidden martyrdom, whereas the martyrdom of Husain was exoteric, public.

Thus the pair implies that in this context at least the exoteric dimension is derived from the esoteric. The context can be widened in a way that would collapse the very distinction between the two coordinates of the exoteric-esoteric binary. In any case, in the model according to which the exoteric emanates from the esoteric requires the mystical martyrdom of the alchemical *mortificatio*. The hidden celestial archetype undergoes a sort of death when crystallized onto the plane of manifestation in the world of sensible forms, which implies limitation, finitude, and thus mortality. This *mortification* establishes a kind of equivalence between the pair of Muhammad and ‘Ali as symbols of the exoteric and esoteric and the pair of Hasan and Husain as equivalent functional symbols of the exoteric and esoteric. A difference between the two pairs is that the first two embrace the hidden and revealed light of God, whereas Hasan and Husain represent primarily the witness and demonstration of the triadic luminal reality constituted by Muhammad, ‘Ali, and Fatima.

The first 33 of the 99 Islamic names of God pertain to the Muhammadan Paraclete dimension. The second set of 33 names pertain to ‘Ali’s transcendent dimension. The final 33 names pertain to the Fatiman unifying dimension. At the end of the invocation of the 99 names, the 99 become the One, that is, the secret, hidden name of God. This name of God cannot be revealed because it lies beyond the subject-object dichotomy, and thus beyond all language. Language, after all, emerges from, and is bound to, the limitative domains of time, space, subject, object. Thus by definition language cannot express the inexpressible. This void of silence, of inexpressibility, is reflected in *sura* 55:72’s sheltered pavilions of Paradise. Unity is prior to multiplicity, and therefore the hundredth unrevealed divine name is better than the 99 revealed names.

Fatima, like Mary, represents the divine void. This void is alluded to in Mary’s fast of silence, of inexpressibility, as recorded in *sura* 19. This inexpressibility issues forth into the revelation of the Word, allegorically described as Mary bringing forth the Word. “‘I will by no means speak to anyone this day.’ so she brought forth the child.” The expressibility of this Word is a miraculous speaking, and thus the infant Jesus spoke in the cradle. His miraculous speech,

according to Islamic thought, alludes to Jesus' status as the Word of God, the speech of God. Mary is the divine silence who brings forth the divine Word. This is congruent with Pseudo-Ignatius of Antioch's *Letter to the Ephesians* 19 which refers to "the virginity of Mary and her childbearing and likewise also the death of the Lord—three mysteries to be cried aloud—the which were wrought in the silence of God."¹⁹⁷ This author means that Mary is the very matrix of divine silence. She is the "void" which cannot be spoken yet which gives birth to all Word and speech, for the mystery is "to be cried aloud." Mary as silence spoke, and the theophany of that speech was her child the Word, Jesus.

Viewed from such an angle, Mary's conspicuous near-absence in the canonical Christian scriptures is but a necessary result of her status as the divine silence. That she becomes more prominent in the later Church could be viewed from an Islamic perspective as a preparation of the world for Mary's more preeminent status in the Qur'an and in Islamic theology and esoterism. The similarities between the Qur'anic accounts of Mary and Jesus and the relevant New Testament apocryphal writings could in such a model be explained in this way. This Muslim amplification of the significance of Mary's person results, viewed from an Islamic context, from the Paraclete nature of Islam. The Paraclete manifests itself in feminine Wisdom mode as Mary and in masculine Word mode as Muhammad. In his inner reality he would correspond to the sacred Father, the tenth intellect, which is but a refraction or reflection of the First intellect, *nous*, so that the sacred Father connotes the *logos*. Accordingly, the Prophet's son-in-law 'Ali would correspond to the "son," the "esoteric" *logos*. Finally, Fatima would correspond to the mother, the *umm al-kitab*, the Mother of the Book, who is the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹⁷ Ignatius continues by writing that these three mysteries were made known to the ages, or aeons, by the star of Bethlehem. But what does the third mystery, that of Jesus' death, have to do with the star of the nativity? The pseudo-apostolic father explains that Jesus' nativity brought the eternal life which abolished death. The sacred mystery of Jesus' birth therefore proleptically encompasses the mystery of the "death of the Lord." For Islam, the death of Christ is an eschatological event associated with the approach of the end of the world. The latter perspective agrees with the scenario in 4 Ezra 7:28ff.

22. The Esoteric Kingdom of Prophecy and Wisdom

The Uwaysis are Islamic mystics initiated in the realm of the spirit directly by the saint *al-Khidr*, who is variously identified as the Green Man and Elijah. The chain of transmission which conveys the *baraka* of the Prophet is not broken on account of the non-corporeal nature of the *Khidr* initiation, for from the mundane perspective the unseen is more real than the seen. The Uwaysis are alone, spurned as it were by their contemporaries, for these mystics have not been entrusted with the standard physical, or “manual,” transmission of the *baraka*. Fatima is symbolically the hand of God, and it is this hand which transmits the Prophet’s *baraka* to the Uwaysis. Their aloneness makes them the solitary ones, the *afrad*.

The Arabic word *afrad* corresponds conceptually to the Coptic noun *monakhos* found in the *Gospel of Thomas logia* 49 and 75. *Logion* 49: “Jesus said: ‘Blessed are the solitary (unitary) and chosen ones, for you will discover the kingdom, for you are from the kingdom and will return to her.’” The word “discover” reflects the Coptic verb *he*, which is difficult to translate precisely. In *logion* 2, it is said that “whoever *he e* the interpretation of these sayings will not taste of death.” *He e* means literally “falls upon,” and the *logion*’s context (see *logion* 3 which commands one to “seek” and to “find”) indicates that the phrase means “to find,” “to discover,” “to come upon through diligent search.” *Logion* 49’s basic scenario is paralleled in a number of Qur’anic *ayat* which speak of the believer’s origin and return to God. *Sura* 7:29: “As he brought you into being, so will ye return (unto him).”

Logion 75: “Jesus said: ‘Many stand at the door, but the solitary (unitary) ones will enter the marriage chamber.’” A *hadith* of the Prophet reads: “I am the house of Wisdom and ‘Ali is its door.” “Many stand at the door,” says the *Gospel of Thomas*. ‘Ali is this door, and the house of Wisdom corresponds in an Islamic setting to the kingdom referred to in the *Thomas* gospel *logion* 49, which says of the kingdom, that the solitary ones will “return to her.” This “she” encompasses the divine Wisdom, the Qur’anic *umm al-kitab* (the Mother of the Book), whose manifestation upon the earthly plane is Fatima. The *ahlul bayt*, the People of the House, denotes the family of Muhammad. The kingdom is the house of the Prophet, and in a wider sense, the kingdom of the Prophets, or the kingdom of Prophecy as such. To discover the kingdom implies that one must seek it, which in turn must mean that this kingdom is hidden. Thus it is the esoteric kingdom of Prophecy we are discussing. The gate, or door, to this kingdom is the very theophany of esoterism, ‘Ali.

From one angle of vision, Muhammad is heaven and ‘Ali is Earth.¹⁹⁸ Fatima, moreover, is Paradise, the Garden of Eden, for she was conceived from the jeweled-fruit her father ate from the beatific tree of Paradise. According to a *hadith* of the Prophet, he said of Fatima, “I smell the fragrance of Paradise emanating from her.” Moreover, one of Fatima’s traditional titles is *khatun e-junat*, “Lady of Paradise.” In *Thomas logion* 75, to enter the bridal chamber means to enter the

¹⁹⁸ In this context, “earth” means the *Terra lucida*; see the following footnote’s reference to ‘Ali’s earthly light.

Garden of Eden, which in Islamic symbology is inhabited by the pure *houris*, who represent theophanic refractions of Fatima, the Edenic theophany herself.

Thomas *logion* 19 declares there are five trees in Paradise which bestow immortality. As previously explained, these five trees are allegorically, as the Ismaili gnostic text *Umm al-Kitab*, the five members of the *ahlul bayt*. From another equally valid point of view, ‘Ali corresponds symbolically to heaven.¹⁹⁹ In this context, heaven is esoteric, hidden, concealed from mortals because it is distant and separated from the earthly plane (and as such transcendent). By contrast, Muhammad is the earth, the revealed messenger whose mission pertained historically to the exoteric dimension, the kingdom of the earth, the seen. Thus the kingdom is “within you,” concealed from view, and “outside you,” literally “manifest to the outer eye,” according to *Thomas logion* 3, which in this way anagogically corresponds for Muslims to Muhammad’s and ‘Ali’s supernal royalty. The same inner and outer domains of royalty are spoken of in *sura* 41:53: “We shall show them Our portents on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the truth.” The “horizons” pertain to the exoteric witness of Muhammad, the “within” pertains to the esoteric “celestiality” of ‘Ali, and the “it” of the phrase “it is the truth” refers simultaneously to Fatima and the Mahdi.

The kingdom of God is both inward and outward, that is, esoteric and exoteric. The discovery of this kingdom which embraces the esoterism of ‘Ali and the exotericism of Muhammad will result in self-gnosis, as the hadith states: “He who knows himself knows his Lord.” The one who know himself will in turn be known, that is, they will be known by God. God will know God in the one who knows himself. These gnostics are “the children of the father who lives.” According to traditional Islamic philosophy and theology, the term “sacred Father” denotes the tenth intelligence, or active intellect. The Father-intellect is said to be “living” because as Plotinus teaches, to know is to be, knowledge is being, Being is life.

We have explained that Fatima is a manifestation on the earthly plane of the preexistent Lady Wisdom known from the Jewish scriptures. And we have shown that Lady Wisdom corresponds in Islam to the Qur’anic *umm al-kitab*, the preexistent Mother of the Book, that is, the mother of the divine Amr, the Word of God. In her solar mode of esoterism, Fatima is the Lady of light, *al-Zahra*. In her lunar mode of esoterism, she is the “night” of majesty, according to Shi’ite interpretation of *sura al-Qadr*. As the “night,” the Prophet’s daughter “is peace until the day dawns” (*sura* 97:5), that is, until her solar modality once again manifests itself. Under her lunar aspect, Fatima is the concealment symbolized by the night, and as such we have here an allusion to the purest modality of esoterism. *Sura* 55:72, “Dark-eyed, sheltered in pavilions” (Abdel Haleem translation). These dark eyes and the darkness of sheltered pavilions of Paradise may in all justice be applied to Fatima.

The Lady of light’s illumination is none other than that of God, who “is the light of the heavens and the earth.” That this luminosity, according to the Light Verse, “is neither of the east nor the west” denotes that in its essence it is ever bright, in contrast to the fluctuating light of the sun at its rising in the east and its setting in the west. The alternating dimming and unveiling of the sun are

¹⁹⁹ Sayyid Sharaf al-Din Astarabadi in his *Ta’wil al-Ayat* commenting upon *sura al-Hadid* aya 28 records a *hadith* of the Prophet according to which ‘Ali has two lights, a light in heaven and a light upon earth.

not of the essence of the light, but merely reflect the oscillating perspectives born of the limitations of the human consciousness' perception.

According to *sura al-Qadr*, the Word (*amr*) in all its fullness (*kull; pleroma*) descends on the night of majesty. The light of God's Word must of necessity be revealed in the night, for the night is a symbol of peace, of *salam*, and by extension, of Islam, which emerges from both surrender and its resultant peace. Peace denotes rest, passiveness; yet such passiveness is in truth the receptive matrix of the active *amr*, or proclamation. Thus we arrive at an active surrender, the *jihad* (literally, "struggle," "striving") of surrender. This mystery is alluded to in the Qur'an, which speaks of those "who struggle in God" (*sura 29:69*). To struggle *in God* presupposes an indwelling in the divine mystery. The immanent presence of believers "within" the divine presence entails far more than a passive quietude. The believer is certainly the house of God, where the divine One dwells in the fragrance of celestial peace. Yet this peace, by extension this "Islam," is inseparable, in the realm of contingency, from *jihad*, struggle. *Jihad* involves the strivings related to both the spiritual life and the intellective powers on the *via* to attainment of the theophanic mysteries of Muhammad, 'Ali, and Fatima, which respectively correspond to the terrestrial, celestial, and paradisical realms of the divine kingdom.

23. Sura Al-Kahf: The Story of *Al-Khidr* and Moses

Moses said to his servant Joshua: “I will not stop till I reach the confluence of the two seas, or for years I will journey on” (*sura* 18:60). The two seas are exoteric and esoteric knowledge and wisdom. In Sh’ite thought, their confluence is Fatima, the Lady of light, the Confluence of the two lights who are Muhammad and ‘Ali. The confluence results in the expansion of the divine light, hence the Qur’anic phrase from the celebrated Light Verse, “light upon light” (*sura* 24:35). To arrive at the confluence requires a journey of many years, and therefore perseverance is vital in this odyssey of the soul’s journey (*suluk*). The ultimate destination is not esoteric knowledge, but rather the confluence of the exoteric and esoteric modes of wisdom. At this confluence the exoteric and the esoteric pass away. The point of confluence lies beyond all distinctions of knowledge, for it constitutes the very source of both exoteric and esoteric knowledge.

“But when they reached their confluence, they forgot their fish, and it took its way in the sea at will” (*sura* 18:61). At the banks, at the frontiers of the unitive state that surpasses the exoteric-esoteric binary, Moses and Joshua were not prepared. The fish, symbol of esoteric knowledge, returned to the sea of pure unity from which it originally had come. Joshua forgot the fish at the rock where they had rested, and it miraculously escaped to the sea. Miraculously, for the fish would have been presumably dead. Its going to the sea therefore suggests a resurrection from the dead. While resting at the rock of exoteric knowledge, esoteric knowledge escaped them and returned to their source. The rock, which is solid, contrasts with the fluidity of the water of gnosis. But solidity and fluidity are not absolute opposites. Moses had once struck the rock and from it issued forth twelve streams of water for the twelve tribes of Israel. The rock thus stands for exoteric knowledge, the Torah, which one must penetrate in order to perceive its esoteric inwardness.²⁰⁰ Joshua failed to do this and the esoteric knowledge escaped him. It miraculously made its way to the sea of pure unity, the domain which lies beyond the seen and the unseen.

“It is this we were in quest of”; that is, the fish, which is esoteric knowledge. They retraced their steps, in order to find the fish again, but instead of finding the fish, they encounter *al-Khidr*, the embodiment of esoteric knowledge. He is therefore another manifestation or form of the self-same fish. *Al-Khidr* had received mercy and knowledge from God. He was in fact a manifestation, a theophany, of the esoteric knowledge of the divine, emanating from the mercy of God. This mercy thus establishes a link with the confluence, which is Fatima and Mary as manifestations of the *umm al-kitab*.²⁰¹

Instead of following the fish, Moses wants to follow *al-Khidr*, for he recognizes *al-Khidr* as the embodiment of the esoteric knowledge he had been seeking in the fish. For this “following” one needs perseverance, patience. To have patience, however, one must possess understanding, that is,

²⁰⁰ The rock is a symbol of the seen, for it is fixed, like the Law, and thus plainly visible. The fish, in that it vanished from view represents the unseen. In that it is living, it is not fixed; it is moving, alive, for the spirit blows where, and how, she wills. The fish escapes to the confluence of the two rivers of knowledge, the exoteric and esoteric rivers of insight. This demonstrates that esoteric Wisdom does not spurn or reject the exoteric, the Law.

²⁰¹ It is worthy of note that *sura al-Kahf*, which contains the account of *al-Khidr*, immediately precedes *sura Maryam*, for both Mary and *al-Khidr* “coincide” with the *ruh*, albeit in varying modes.

the esoteric insight concealed beneath, or behind, the outward actions which the master performs as various means of instruction, which urge the disciple to his gaze beyond the exoteric Torah, into the vision of its hidden divine purposes and intentions. Only in this manner, only with this vision of the interior intent of the Torah can a master be equipped and fully competent to simplify certain matters of the outward Law for the sake of the realization of its inward depths. A few illustrative examples of such simplification include the Qur'an's proclamation that *dikhr* is better than prescribed prayers (*sura* 29:45); that the true *qibla* is neither of the East nor of the West, but is a righteous turning of the heart toward God (*sura* 2:177); and that the best of clothing is obedience and sincerity before God (*sura* 7:26).

Even though on the earthly plane Fatima is as daughter subordinate to her father as to biological and temporal origin, and though she is the spouse of 'Ali on the same earthly plane, at the symbolic level Fatima is the luminous liquid point from which originate the two lights. The one light represents exoteric knowledge, the Prophet, and the second being esoteric knowledge, 'Ali. Anagogically considered, Muhammad therefore originates from Fatima. This is precisely why Shi'ite tradition calls Fatima "the Mother of her Father." Fatima is the *umm* (mother) from which the *kitab* (which corresponds to Muhammad) originates. *Al-Khidr* in one sense also represents esoteric wisdom and knowledge, like 'Ali. Fatima is the sea of pure unity from which flows the two seas of the two kinds of knowledge, namely, the esoteric and exoteric modes of insight. Thus on the anagogical plane, Fatima enjoys at one level an ontological priority in relation to her father and husband.

To recapitulate our reflections we will here present the following schema according to the paradigm of the *ahlul bayt*:

The rock = Exoteric Knowledge/Wisdom = Muhammad as Prophet
The fish = Esoteric Knowledge/Wisdom = 'Ali as Imam of the Prophet
The sea = Unity and Wisdom as such = Fatima

In this arrangement, Fatima is the sea of unity, which is the source of the two kinds of knowledge represented by Muhammad and 'Ali. So from the angle of unity as such, Fatima is the mother, the source, and the matrix of her own father Muhammad.

As a final observation on this narrative we record here that the sixth and eighth of the holy Imams report that beneath the wall repaired by *al-Khidr*, tablets were discovered which contained esoteric wisdom. The following text of one of the tablets is given by the holy Imams Jafar ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq and 'Ali ibn Musa al-Reza:

In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate.
There is no God save I (myself).
I wonder at the man who is sure of death and yet rejoices.
I wonder at the man who knows that only the Will of the Lord is done and yet grieves.
I wonder at the man who knows the uncertainty of this world and yet covets for it.²⁰²

²⁰² *The Holy Qur'an: Arabic Text, with English Translation and Commentary. With Special Notes from Ayatullah Agha Haji Mirza Mahdi Pooya Yazdi*. Translated by S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali. (4th ed.; New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc., 2004), p. 936. We have modified the translation.

The three cases of “wonder” transparently correspond to the three tests *al-Khidr* imposed upon Moses as recounted in the Qur’anic narrative of their encounter.

To repeat a previous point, the rock stands for exoteric knowledge, the Torah, which one must penetrate in order to perceive its esoteric inwardness. If one reads this statement carefully its provisional character will become evident. If the exoteric, the Torah, contains the esoteric, then not only is the Torah both exoteric and esoteric, but ultimately it transcends the exoteric-esoteric dichotomy. Functionally or practically, the way to transcend this binary of the inward-outward is to start not with the inward but with the outward. Accordingly, *sura 57:3* gives privileges the outward over the inward: “He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward. He is All-Knowing.” Although here the outward is privileged over the inward, this is so only because as a consequence both coordinates of the outward-inward binary will be overcome. It will be overcome in a state that encompasses all knowledge (hence, “He is All-Knowing”), that is knowledge that is both exoteric and esoteric and even beyond.

24. Ending At the Beginning Beginning At the Ending

The Judaic Roots of Abrahamic Ontology and Wisdom

In this monograph I have traced the various threads that Christianity and Islam wove out of the Jewish fabric of ontology and wisdom traditions. As for Jewish ontology, this is based principally on Deuteronomy 6:4. As for Jewish wisdom traditions, these revolve around the personified entity conventionally called Lady Wisdom; she is known most famously from her speech in Proverbs 8. Deuteronomy 6:4's profession of monotheism is later developed in Jewish esoteric texts into a doctrine of universal monism. As for Proverbs 8's Lady Wisdom, she is already subtly linked to the Torah in Psalms 19 and 119. In Sirach 24 and in Baruch 3-4 Lady Wisdom is identified as the personified earthly Torah scroll. This identification of Lady Wisdom with Lady Torah is carried further in Targumic and Rabbinic exegesis which identifies Genesis 1:1's "beginning" as Lady Torah who serves as a personified blue-print or architectural plan that God consults before carrying out the drama of creation. This identification was facilitated in part by Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" read together with Psalm 19:10's Torah title "The fear of the LORD." The Torah hymn Psalm 111 congruently ends with a hint at this tradition in the final verse, 10a: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

By the first century CE Jewish tradition has identified Lady Wisdom with the Holy Spirit (Wisdom 1:4-5,7; 9:17; cf. 7:7 "spirit of wisdom"; 7:22 "For in her [i.e., Wisdom] there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy"). The phrase "Holy Spirit" first appears in Isaiah 63:10 and 11. In Wisdom 9:1-2 Wisdom (*sophia*) becomes a synonym of Word (*logos*):

1 O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy,
who hast made all things by thy word,
2 and by thy wisdom hast formed man. . . .

The author of the Wisdom of Solomon in this passage presupposes an identity between God's creative speech (*logos*) in the Genesis creation account and Lady Wisdom (*sophia*).

Jewish tradition links Proverbs 8:22's Lady "Wisdom" with Genesis 1:1's "beginning." In this way Proverbs 8:22 and Genesis 1:1 are linked. In turn, the divine name 'Elohim links Genesis 1:1 and Deuteronomy 6:4. In the holy *Zohar*, the second *sefira*, Wisdom (*hokhma*), creates the third *sefira*, Understanding (*binah*). The *sefira Binah* is identified as Genesis 1:1's 'Elohim. In this way Wisdom can also be read into Deuteronomy 6:4's divine name 'Elohim (in the form 'Eloheinu).

If we attend carefully to the letters of the first word of Genesis 1:1, בְּרֵאשִׁית (*beth-resh-'alef-shin-yod-tav*) we can discover some key insights regarding the nature of temporality.

- 1 Beth = letter 2 // Present
- 2 Resh = letter 20 // Future (beginning)
- 3 'Alef = letter 1 // Past
- 4 Shin = letter 21 // Future (continuance)
- 5 Yod = letter 10

6 Tav = letter 22 // Future (ending)

In alternating sequence, letters 2, 4, and 6 represent respectively the Hebrew alphabet's final three letters, that is, letters 20, 21, and 22. Letters 1 and 3 are *beth* and *'alef*, the second and first letters of the Hebrew alphabet. What stands out here is that whereas the alphabet's final three letters appear in their normal forward sequence, that is, letters 20, 21, and 22, the alphabet's first and second letters appear in reverse sequence, namely, *beth-'alef*, instead of *'alef-beth*.

Because *'alef* occurs before *beth*, and because the past occurs before the present, we can understand *'alef* as a symbol for the past and *beth* as a symbol for the present. We can then understand *resh-shin-tav* as symbols for the arrow of the unfolding future.

From this model we can understand that creation first begins with the Now that is *beth*, but then unfolds towards the Past that is *'alef*. The universe thus emerges counterintuitively from the present and proceeds towards the past.

Between the respective points of the present and past (*beth* and *'alef*), the first point of the future emerges, represented by *resh*. This means that the future (*resh*) begins unfolding before the arrival of the past (*'alef*).

The future is thus imbricated within the reversal of past and present. As the present moves towards the past, the first sign of the future emerges. After the past has emerged, it is followed by the continuing future (*shin*).

Preceding the end-point of the future (*tav*) is *yod*, which as the alphabet's letter 10 refers to the ten instances of the Genesis chapter 1 formula "And God said," which Kabbalah later envisages as symbols of the ten *sefirot*. *Yod* is also the first letter of the sacred Tetragrammaton.

We can in a complementary way interpret the *resh* as follows. Because the *resh* is the first letter of the word *reishit*, "beginning," the cosmic beginning that is the past coincides with the beginning of the future. Thus the cosmos unfolds from the future towards the future. That is, the cosmos unfolds triadically from the futural beginning (*resh*), then from the futural continuance (*shin*), towards the finality that is the futural end-point (*tav*).

This Genesis-based model of time is eminently dreamlike, which calls to mind the ancient trope of life or the world as a dream.²⁰³ One need not flee to the Far East to encounter this idea. We find it in near at hand in Psalm 90:

4 For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

5 Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a dream; in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.

6 In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

10 The days of our years are threescore years and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore years; yet is their pride but travail and vanity; for it is speedily gone, and we fly away.

²⁰³ On the trope of life and the world as a dream, there is no profounder exploration than that by Elliot R. Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted Within a Dream: Oneiropoiesis and the Prism of Imagination* (New York: Zone Books, 2011).

The human response to the fact of life as a fleeting dream is found in verse 12: “So teach us to number our days, that we may get us a heart of wisdom.” The answer lies at hand that one gets a heart of wisdom by studying Torah. But what is the deeper significance of the numbering or counting of days? There is a hint at the answer in the following observations. First we recall that Psalms 90, 91, and 92 form a triad.²⁰⁴ Next we take into account these three psalms’ respective word-totals, which are $140+112+112=364$. 364 hints at the (solar) calendar. The differences between the lunar and solar calendars is not too important in this context. What is basic is the allusion to the calendar, which implies the ability to calculate and observe the various liturgical feasts throughout the year, as well as the weekly Sabbath. In the (solar) calendar there are 52 weeks in the year. 52 is a multiple of 26, the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton.

The center of the Psalm 90-92 triad is Psalm 91. The significance of 91 is that in the solar calendar there are four seasons of 91 days each in a year; $91 \times 4 = 364$. However, 91 also accords with the numerical values of ’Adonai YHWH, $65+26=91$. Cf. the divine oracle of Psalm 91:14-16, which contains 64 letters in verses 14-15 and 27 letters in verse 16. 64 is one less in rank than 65, the numerical value of ’Adonai,²⁰⁵ while 27 is one more in rank than 26, the Tetragrammaton’s numerical value. Together, $64+27=91$. 91 also coincides with the numerical value of Deuteronomy 6:4’s two instances of YHWH and ’echad, $26+26+13=91$. The divine names are thus imbricated within the ancient liturgical calendar.

When Psalm 90:12 instructs us to number our days, this therefore hints at the relation between existence (both human and cosmic), time, and the divine names, above all and principally the sacred Tetragrammaton. The time in which we live is implicated within the Tetragrammaton, which means that mortal life is lived immersed within the framework of the eternal divine Name. This is ritually maintained by the regular recitation of the *Shema Israel*.

Within the daily and nightly rhythm of the *Shema* we live.

Within the daily and nightly rhythm of the *Shema* we die.

For with Thee is the fountain of life;
in Thy light do we see light.

~ Psalm 36:10

²⁰⁴ On Psalms 90-92 as a “triptych,” see Phil J. Botha, “Psalm 91 and Wisdom,” *OTE* 25/2 (2012): pp. 260-276: <<http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/ote/v25n2/02.pdf>>; accessed 25 Feb. 2021.

²⁰⁵ In the triptych of Psalms 90-92, the divine name ’Adonai occurs explicitly in Psalm 90:1 and 17, the first and last verses of Psalm 90. V. 17’s ’Adonai is preceded by 130 words, double of 65; this is congruent with Psalm 90’s two instances of ’Adonai. From the *yod* of v. 13’s YHWH to the end of Psalm 90 there are 167 letters, which agrees with the gematria of v. 17’s ’Adonai ’Eloheinu, $65+102=167$. There is likely a simultaneous allusion here to Deut 6:4’s *YHWH ’Eloheinu YHWH ’ehad*, $26+102+26+13=167$.

